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The Sketch

3/6

Christmas Number

No. 2794A VOL. CCXV.
NOVEMBER 15, 1951

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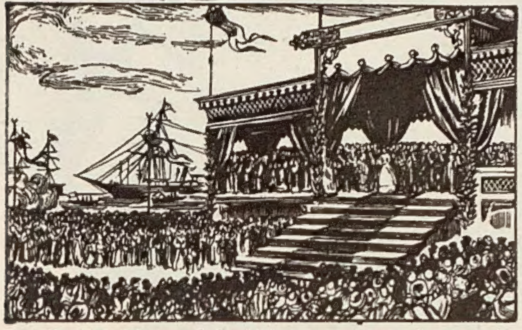
The Sketch
Christmas Number

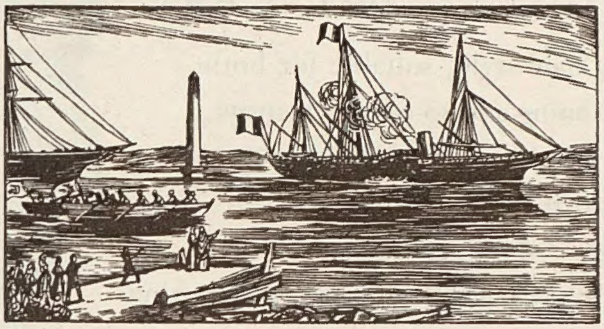
The Editor and Staff of "The Sketch"
wish all their readers
A Very Happy Christmas

The Empress Eugénie opens the Suez Canal

AN EPISODE BASED ON HISTORICAL FACT



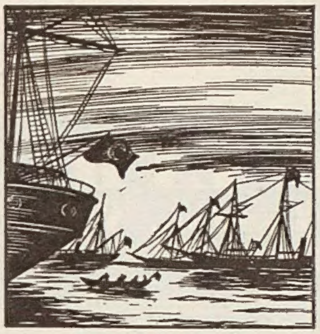
Port Said in 1869—and the African sun streams down on the brilliant inaugural ceremony at which the Empress Eugénie of France formally opens the Suez Canal, just ten years after the first spadeful of sand was turned.



The next day, 68 vessels under many flags begin the hundred-mile passage from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. The flotilla is led by the Imperial yacht, the "Aigle," with the Empress on board.

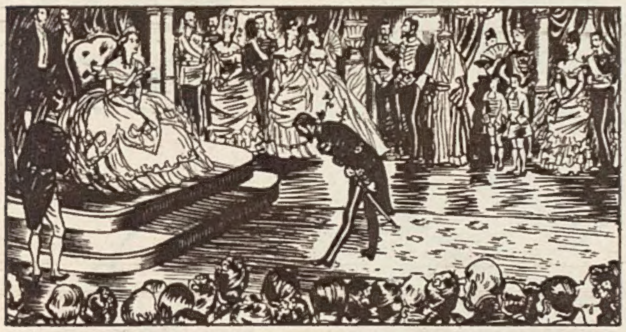
In torrid Egypt, as in Paris, her refreshing toilet water—Jean Marie Farina Eau de Cologne—brings cool solace.

On the first day, the Empress and her attendant convoy reach Ismailia, on Lake Timsa. Half the journey is completed, and the ships' companies are in high spirits.



After a day's halt for celebrations, the journey is resumed, and the next evening the pioneer fleet foregathers in the Bitter Lakes.

Another twenty-four hours brings the vessels to Suez, and the dream of de Lesseps has come true—the neck of Africa has been crossed by ship for the first time.



Throughout the ordeal of the voyage across the desert, which even now can be trying to temper and complexion, the Empress has retained the elegance and charm for which she is renowned; for she has made frequent and lavish use of Jean Marie Farina Eau de Cologne.

Still the premier Cologne . . .

Since its initial success at Napoleon's Court in 1806, Jean Marie Farina has held uninterrupted sway as the world's premier Eau de Cologne; uninterrupted, but not undisputed—for no fewer than 39 lawsuits against imitators have been fought and won by its manufacturers, Roger & Gallet. You cannot be misled if you insist on seeing the name ROGER & GALLET on the label. If you have any difficulty, write to Roger & Gallet (London) Ltd., N.W.2.

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The Empress MARIE-LOUISE
The Emperor NAPOLEON III
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"CHRISTMAS AT LONGLEAT—70 YEARS AGO."

By the Marchioness of Bath.

IMAGINE YOURSELF INVITED to stay for Christmas in a large country house seventy years ago, in the days of elegance and plenty, when country-house living could still be conducted in the grand manner. Imagine this invitation comes from the fourth Marquess of Bath, who asks you to visit him and his family at Longleat, the lovely grey stone house built by Sir John Thynne in 1566 and lived in by his descendants ever since.

You arrive at Frome Station on Christmas Eve, and from there drive four miles through the wintry Wiltshire countryside in a landau drawn by a pair of spanking bays, with a coachman and a footman on the box. Your luggage, in charge of the maids and the valets, will be taken to the house in a wagonette.

On the steps of Longleat you are met by the dignified figure of the butler, who awaits the arrival of the visitors at the front door. Behind him stand two powdered footmen, 6 ft. tall, in their buckled shoes. They are wearing the family livery: mustard-yellow coats fastened with crested buttons and trimmed with silver braid, and plush knee-breeches.

You pass through into the big hall, where a log fire is blazing merrily. Here the gardeners are giving the final touches to the Christmas decorations : garlands of evergreen and bunches of holly and mistletoe. A huge Christmas tree stands at the foot of the staircase, twinkling and shimmering with tinsel and glass.

Your host and hostess are with their family in the red library, ready to greet their guests. The silver teapot and kettle reflect the firelight, the tea-tables are spread with white cloths and laden with the delicious cakes, biscuits and scones that have been confected in the still-room.

Twenty visitors have been invited to stay at Longleat for a fortnight. The Christmas party is identical every year and consists of relations and family friends. The pattern is only changed by death or birth. Each succeeding Christmas the same dear old jokes are revived and re-cracked ; the thread is taken up where it was dropped the year before.

The nursery wing is crowded, for cousins and friends of the children of the house have already settled in, with all the paraphernalia that accompanies nannies on the move.

The Christmas visit to Longleat is a great event in the lives of the young nursery maids, who normally lead a cloistered existence and are allowed even less liberty than the other young maids, since they are constantly at the beck and call of the nurse, for whom they fetch and carry, and who keeps as close an eye

Illustrated by Ronald Searle.

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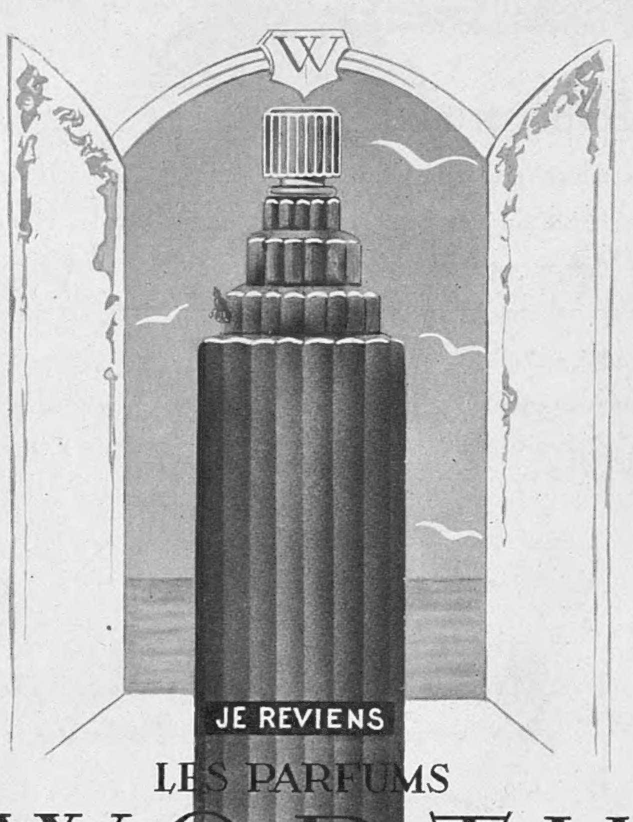

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FOUNDED 1834

on them as she does on the children in her charge. But at Longleat there is always a chance of slipping away—it is such a very big house—and a door might open and a handsome groom of the chambers appear upon the scene. . . .

After all, one nursery maid had even married a groom of the chambers, much to the astonishment of the members of the steward's room, who wondered where on earth these two could have met. If only they had known, it was over the nursery sink that the first encounter took place, while the pretty nursery maid was doing her washing-up. (In those days marriage with a nursery maid was a very dashing and progressive move for a groom of the chambers to make, so this particular gallant must have loved recklessly, scorning the disapproval of the steward's room hierarchy.)

If the fairy-prince of the nursery maid's dream fails to materialise in the shape of a groom of the chambers, there is always the possibility of a backstairs, round-the-corner flirtation with the third footman, whose duty is to wait upon the nursery.

The children love to escape from the apron-string control of the nanny to the more robust atmosphere of the pantry. To them the nursery footman is a link with this attractive, manly life. He is the popular hero of the nursery : admired by the children, desired by the maids.

On Christmas Eve, the over-excited children are put to bed as early as possible. Some of them are bound to stay awake till midnight so as to watch Father Christmas through half-shut eyes as he fills their stockings at the foot of their bed . . . and then they might notice that he has the same aquiline cast of features and is about the same height as the most noble Marquess.

Below stairs, the kitchen, glowing with the burnished copper of pots and pans, is a buzzing hive of activity. Monsieur Gaillard, the French chef, is in his most excitable mood. The kitchen has so much to do, so many extra mouths to feed : twenty visitors staying in the house—all these ladies' maids and valets—ten extra in the nursery—separate meals to be cooked for the dining-room, nursery, steward's room and servants' hall . . . *ah, ces fêtes de Noël* !

Supervised by Mrs. Potts, the housekeeper, the still-room have prepared the plum-puddings months ago. Five-shilling pieces lie hidden inside them and they have all been laced with the best brandy. And as they stirred the mixture, the children made their wishes.

The servants' hall is gay with holly and mistletoe ; everyone has had a hand in decorating it. A log fire roars in the chimney and large leather flagons of Longleat-brewed ale stand on the table. Any caller at the back door stays to have a glass or two of this brew and an extra one for a Merry Christmas.

Even after dinner the atmosphere of expectation persists ; everyone is keyed up. It is midnight, but the house is still astir. And as you lie awake you start thinking about the Longleat ghosts. . . .

Do you hear the light tread of the Grey Lady—the second Viscountess Weymouth ? She is the most beautiful visitant to the house. That was her picture you saw in the dining-room ; that pink-and-white dress was the one she wore at the Spanish Ambassador's ball in London. Was it at this ball that she met the young stranger who was so in love with her that he disguised himself as a serving-man so as to be employed in the house ? But his identity was discovered by Lord Weymouth, who challenged him to a duel, and the young lover was killed before Louisa Weymouth's eyes.

And now, veiled and dressed in grey, she paces the corridor where the duel was fought. Here, in the Grey Lady's Walk, ghostly shadows have been seen, the figures of two men in single combat. Their silhouettes flicker on the wall of the passage ; the two bodies that throw these sinister shadows are not to be seen, but as they thrust and parry, the clash of steel on steel can be heard.

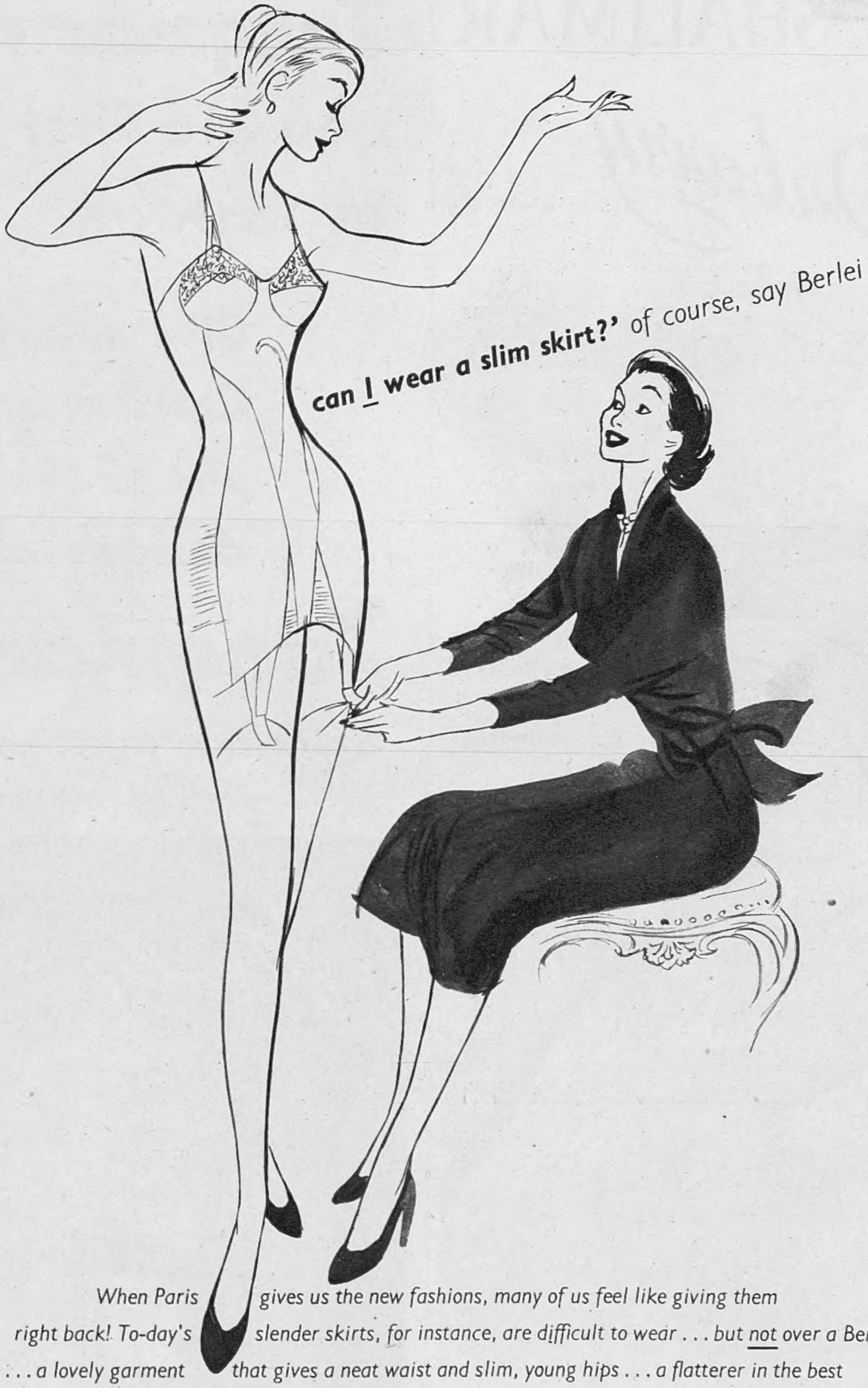
Is there any truth in this story of the beautiful Louisa and her reckless lover ? You do not know. Nobody knows. But you remember that her husband suddenly left Longleat, giving no reason for his departure, and went to live in a small house in the village. Meanwhile, Louisa died. And many years after her husband's death, a body was found buried beneath the paving-stones of the cellar : the body of an unknown youth wearing the same sort of boots as were worn at the time that the second Viscount Weymouth lived at Longleat.

A less tragic ghost than the Grey Lady is the benign spectral form of the good Bishop Ken, who spent his last twenty years at Longleat, where he peacefully died. It is easy to imagine him returning to read his Bible in the old library, the room that he loved so much, where he wrote many of his hymns and devout poems.

Or is your bedroom close to Monmouth's Stairs ? Then the footsteps you hear may be those of the ill-fated Duke slowly

" M. Gaillard is in his most excitable mood. . . ."

E



When Paris gives us the new fashions, many of us feel like giving them right back! To-day's slender skirts, for instance, are difficult to wear . . . but not over a Berlei Controlette . . . a lovely garment that gives a neat waist and slim, young hips . . . a flatterer in the best Berlei tradition. Every Controlette is designed to fit perfectly one of the five figure types to which every woman belongs . . . and that includes YOU.

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Christmas at Longleat—(continued).

ascending the spiral staircase as though he was mounting a scaffold.

Sleep comes slowly and it is not until the small hours that Longleat has its Christmas brood safely cradled within its grey walls.

Early next morning—Christmas at last—the house is stirring again. The children, who have been awake since dawn, are furtively pinching the promising bulges in their stockings.

At eight o'clock you are called by a housemaid wearing a pretty chintz dress, white cap and apron. She draws the curtains to reveal the red sun rising on a frosty scene. On the bedside table she places the early morning tray, with its violet-patterned teaset.

Christmas, like every other day at Longleat, begins with prayers in the chapel, attended by the whole household before breakfast. Later in the morning there will be a longer service, at which the staff file in to their seats in order of domestic precedence, the maids wearing demure black bonnets, with velvet ribbons tied under the chin.

At breakfast you find a pile of gaily-wrapped parcels by your plate: presents from your host and hostess, the family and fellow-guests. After breakfast, all the maids go to Lady Bath's sitting-room, where she wishes them a Very Merry Christmas and presents each one with the usual gift of a length of dress material. The upper servants are visited by Lord and Lady Bath and given their gifts and Christmas greetings personally.

Christmas luncheon is a really hearty affair. You take your place at the dining-table and, with appetite sharpened by the first course, await the arrival of the fat turkeys which have been slowly roasted on a mechanically-turned spit. They make an imposing entry, with their retinue of sauces and vegetables served in silver dishes. The dining-room is plunged into darkness before the plum-pudding is carried in, blazing dramatically and decorated with holly, and in its wake come plump mince-pies. The luncheon is not complete without the still-room speciality: Morello cherries bottled in brandy.

After this heavy meal there is a time for walking, chatting, sleeping or simply digesting. A visit is made to the stables, and the carriage horses are given a Christmas lump of sugar.

At five o'clock, tea is brought into the drawing-room. Tea, and a festively-decorated sugar-cake, scones and crumpets and seasonal dainties made in the still-room. Here the children make their pretty entrance, soaped and curled, frilled and starched, velvet suits and buckled shoes, embroidered dresses and trailing sashes. There are more presents waiting for them on the Christmas tree and when these have been cut down, they all troop into the big hall for "snapdragon."

All the lights are carried out and in the middle of the table is placed a great dish of sultanas, over which brandy is poured and set alight. The children vie with each other in snatching the fruit from the fire. Now a handful of salt is sprinkled over the yellow flames, turning them blue and green, so that they throw an eerie light on the watching faces. Gentle cousins become horrid witches; an amiable uncle is turned into a demon king; children are transformed into imps and hobgoblins; macabre faces swim and merge together; hands become claws. . . . A child cries, and a lamp is quickly brought into the room.

There is a lull before dinner. You go to your bedroom, where you find a japanned hip-bath and steaming cans of water with towels warming cosily in front of the fire. The ladies' maids and valets are waiting to give their assistance. The ladies will all wear their prettiest evening gowns for the Christmas dinner and the following night their maids will bring these dresses to be admired by all in the servants' hall, where by popular vote the most elegant will be chosen.

While you and your fellow-guests are changing for dinner, the groom of the chambers and the head housemaid, with an under-housemaid to assist them, have torn themselves away from the jollifications of the servants' hall and are now tidying the sitting-rooms. Ever since their mid-day meal of turkey, plum-pudding and mince-pies, there has been music and singing to the continuous flow of the Longleat ale. Parlour tricks have been produced, games with forfeits have been played and greeted with roars of laughter. There will be more fun in the servants' hall to-night.

"Do you hear the light tread of the Grey Lady? . . . the young lover was killed before her eyes. Veiled and dressed in grey, she paces the corridor where the duel was fought."

"The staff file in to their seats in order of domestic precedence, the maids wearing demure black bonnets, with velvet ribbons tied under the chin."

CRÈME-SHALIMAR

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for Soft White Hands

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From all chemists and stores

with a Jacqmar scarf you are first in fashion

Give smartly this Christmas. Choose one of the original designs at

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and leading fashion houses throughout the country

"Gentle cousins become horrid witches ; an amiable uncle is turned into a demon king ; children are transformed into imps . . . . hands become claws."

The maids jig around on the rough paving-stones, the snowflakes feathering their hair. The footmen, in their yellow liveries, join them in the dance."

Revived and changed into their evening finery, the guests emerge like splendid butterflies and moths, and sail into the dining-room for the gastronomic delight of a seven-course dinner. The table is laid with a pink Sèvres dinner-set and decorated with poinsettias grown in the hot-houses. In the middle stands an ornate silver centre-piece depicting the death of Sir Richard Grenville, an ancestor, at the Battle of Lansdowne.

This evening the chef has excelled himself. One of the courses is a sucking-pig, cooked whole on the spit. You find that Longleat keeps a very good cellar. Dinner starts with a curious amber-coloured Château-Yquem, which is served, oddly enough, with the fish. It warms the cockles of your heart with a rich, golden flame. Champagne follows and flows like the conversation. The familiar jokes are greeted with affectionate laughter ; the old become young and the young pretend to be old. To accompany the sweet course there is white wine from the Isle of Samos, a great favourite with the ladies. Dinner is rounded off with port that was laid down the year Lord Bath came of age and with the justly renowned brandy that has mellowed so gently in the Longleat cellar.

Meanwhile the upper servants are dining in great style in the steward's room. The ladies' maids and valets take the rank corresponding to their masters and mistresses and are called by their names. If, for instance, a duke is staying in the house, his valet will have the honour of sitting on the right of the housekeeper, while the maid of a duchess would be placed next to the hierarchical head, the house steward. To-night they are all in evening dress, and if any visiting servant has committed the *faux pas* of failing to bring evening clothes, he has been compelled to dine in the servants' hall.

After dinner, villagers from Horningsham, which lies at the gates of Longleat, come to sing carols to the accompaniment of hand-bells. With them is a troupe of mummers, clowning their way through a traditional local Christmas play which dates back to Elizabethan times.

On the stroke of midnight, the maids all rush out into the courtyard, which is lit by oil-lamps hung on the walls. A band has come to play there and, though the snow is falling, hatless and coatless, the maids jig around on the rough paving-stones, the snowflakes feathering their hair, melting on their apple-cheeks. The footmen, in their yellow liveries, soon join them in the dance, and some of the younger members of the gentry, who are watching from the windows above, go down and take their place among the dancers.

There will be a band and dancing in the courtyard every night until the New Year. (A few days after Christmas a big servants' ball will be held in the dining-room. This is always a great occasion and is attended by the whole household, the family and their friends. The local tradesmen and their wives are also invited and everyone who can, wears evening dress.)

Now the performance is over and the mummers and the carol-singers go to the servants' hall, where they sit round the fire with their mugs of beer, which are constantly being emptied and refilled. When they have drunk their fill, they go off, singing, through the snow. You can see their lanterns bobbing and wavering up the long drive as they wend an unsteady way home.

The sands of this happy Christmas day are running out. A contented drowsiness is settling on the well-fed, well-wined company, and you begin to long for the feathered softness of your four-poster bed and the faint lavender scent of the linen sheets. A good night's sleep is needed before to-morrow's pheasant shoot, at which a hot luncheon is to be sent out from the kitchen in hay boxes and served in a marquee set up in the woods.

The ladies bid their good-nights ; each one collects a glass-shaded candle-stand from a table in the hall. They light their candles and make an enchanting group as they go chattering up the broad staircase, their long-trained dresses trailing behind them. Upstairs they dawdle for a while, gossiping in each other's bedrooms.

Meanwhile the men have gone to the green library for a final cigar.

The snow is still falling outside your bedroom window, so that you appreciate all the more the warm comfort of the firelit indoors. To-night sleep comes quickly. . . .

All is now quiet and the only sound to be heard is the muffled tramp of the night watchman as he makes the rounds of the slumbering house.

THE END.

A Gift of Sheer Delight
Such a joy to receive—and such pleasure to give—these glamorous Bear Brand Stockings! Their long-lasting loveliness will shed the lustre of many kindly thoughts on the giver—long after the last Christmas Tree candle is extinguished.
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CHRISTMAS EVE

CHRISTMAS DAY

CHRISTMAS COMES . . .

The car that *turned the head* of the world

Never perhaps has any car created such a spontaneous world-wide impression as this gracious, spacious and powerful Jaguar Mark VII Saloon. Its XK 120 engine has long been the wonder of the motoring world by its record-breaking performances in the Jaguar Sports Model which has won so many international victories. Capable of speeds in excess of 100 m.p.h. with noiseless, effortless ease, the Mark VII is yet serenely docile in the slowest city traffic. Its stately interior abounds in roominess and comfort, and its exceptional luggage space will house four large suitcases and four big golf bags as well as smaller items. Its all-round visibility, fingerlight but positive steering, extra-powerful, vacuum servo-assisted brakes and superb suspension all combine to make this magnificent saloon the smoothest, surest and safest car you have ever known — the finest car of its class in the world.

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The Mark VII Saloon on show at the Waldorf-Astoria, New York

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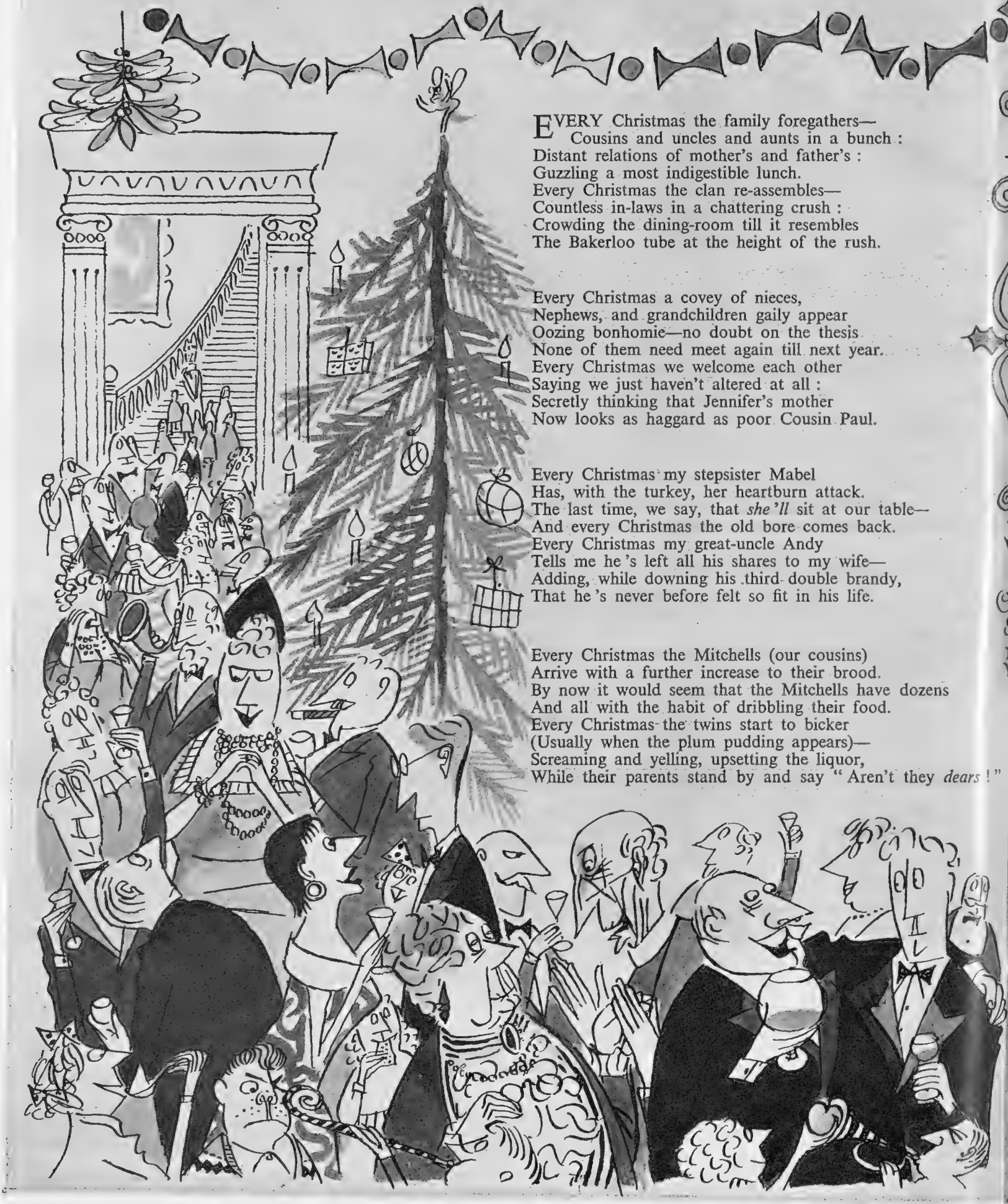
EVERY CHRISTMAS



EVERY Christmas the family foregathers—
Cousins and uncles and aunts in a bunch :
Distant relations of mother's and father's :
Guzzling a most indigestible lunch.
Every Christmas the clan re-assembles—
Countless in-laws in a chattering crush :
Crowding the dining-room till it resembles
The Bakerloo tube at the height of the rush.

Every Christmas a covey of nieces,
Nephews, and grandchildren gaily appear
Oozing bonhomie—no doubt on the thesis
None of them need meet again till next year.
Every Christmas we welcome each other
Saying we just haven't altered at all :
Secretly thinking that Jennifer's mother
Now looks as haggard as poor Cousin Paul.

Every Christmas my stepsister Mabel
Has, with the turkey, her heartburn attack.
The last time, we say, that *she'll* sit at our table—
And every Christmas the old bore comes back.
Every Christmas my great-uncle Andy
Tells me he's left all his shares to my wife—
Adding, while downing his third double brandy,
That he's never before felt so fit in his life.

Every Christmas the Mitchells (our cousins)
Arrive with a further increase to their brood.
By now it would seem that the Mitchells have dozens
And all with the habit of dribbling their food.
Every Christmas the twins start to bicker
(Usually when the plum pudding appears)—
Screaming and yelling, upsetting the liquor,
While their parents stand by and say "Aren't they *dears* !"

Model Cape of grey tinted Russian Squirrel

vickery PERCY VICKERY LTD 28 New Bond St. London W.1

Every Christmas Aunt Monica grumbles
That Christmas is not what it was in her days ;
Every Christmas Aunt Muriel rumbles
And has to go upstairs to loosen her stays.
Every Christmas the vicar, old Messum,
Rises unsteadily (one year he fell)
Proposing the toast of "The Family—God bless 'em !"
While everyone 's wishing the others in hell.

Every Christmas the relatives scatter—
Cousins and uncles and aunts in a heap :
Stomachs distended, and bloated and fatter—
Back to their homes for a much-needed sleep.
Every Christmas we 're forced to go through it.
Every Yule we say "Thank God that 's done !"
Vowing that never again will we do it—
And every Christmas we do. It 's such *fun*.

ALAN MELVILLE.

Illustrated by Michael ffolkes

ARTHUR SANDERSON & SONS LTD., 52/53 BERNERS STREET, LONDON, W. 1. 6/7 NEWTON TERRACE, GLASGOW, C. 3.

Against a fairy-tale set by Jean-Denis Malcles, Cinderella, accompanied by the corps de ballet, drives off to the ball.

Titian-haired Moira Shearer dances the rôle of a dutiful Cinders.

Photographed by Roger Wood.

Sisters Ashton and Helpmann, tired but merry.

It fits—and the Court Jester jumps for joy.

SCENES FROM

I.—As Portrayed by Sadler's Wells.

SIDE BY SIDE with the traditional presentation of the Cinderella pantomime are the newer versions by the ballet in one sphere and by Walt Disney in the other. Here we see the ballet interpretations by Frederick Ashton, Robert Helpmann and Moira Shearer contrasted with similar

Christmas Magic by Elizabeth Arden
* FLOWER MIST . . . Blue Grass, Night and Day, Jasmin, June Geranium, 12/6, 19/7 gaily wrapped and ribboned * Blue Grass, Night and Day with atomiser 25/- * NIGHT AND DAY PERFUME, glamorous as music and moonlight 6 gns * BLUE GRASS DUET with Dusting Powder and Hand Lotion 25/- * MY LOVE PERFUME . . . romance for your love at Christmas, in its plumed bottle and gold lined box 5 gns, 10 gns * BLUE GRASS PERFUME, universally beloved 52/6, and 5 gns
* BEAUTY BOX holding preparations for skin care and make-up, 7½ gns * BLUE GRASS TRIO, Flower Mist, Dusting Powder, Hand Lotion, 37/6 * BLUE GRASS BATH SALTS, 20/9 * PERFUMAIR, with Blue Grass, Night and Day, or My Love scent, 20/9 * TRIPLE PERFUMAIR, 62/6 * TRAVEL CASE, simulated pigskin, with 12 preparations . . . also in simulated lizard or crocodile, 13 gns
ELIZABETH ARDEN 25 OLD BOND STREET LONDON W1

Under a starry sky a pumpkin coach and four white horses carry the Disney Cinderella to the ball.

It fits—no squeezing or pinching.

Two sisters—ugly as ever.

Little Cinders must do the household chores.

" CINDERELLA "

2.—As Portrayed by Walt Disney.

situations in the Disney film. But whichever way you look at it the story is the same : the age-old lesson of how goodness ultimately earns its due reward. And whichever version you fancy, it will make delightful Christmas entertainment, for all ages alike.

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SANTA'S PROGRESS

A SEASONAL MORALITY SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR "THE SKETCH"

By Peter Ustinov

Illustrations by Margaret Wetherbee

SCENE 1.

The scene is laid in the bedroom of a well-to-do couple. FATHER *seems to be undressing.* MOTHER *is seated on the bed, depressed. The noise of children can be heard, screaming delightedly. Bells begin to ring. A party of Carol Singers in the street launch into their little commercial enterprise with various degrees of enthusiasm, flatness and sharpness.*

FATHER: All that 's missing now is the snow . . .

[*He looks out of the window.*]

Here it comes, right on cue, blast it! Romantic and white. Snow-white, in fact. Ghastly!

MOTHER: Oh, Frederick!

FATHER: Christmas is a single day, Grace. The office goes on for ever. Think of the roads on Tuesday. With tyres the price they are, I can't afford a new set—not until we pull off that deal with Amalgamated Albuminium Phosphates and I can legitimately charge them to expenses. The agreement, if it comes off, if that fool Barrett doesn't overstate our case, should mean a deal of extra travelling.

MOTHER: Can't you forget the office for one moment, Fred? For the children's sake——

FATHER: I am forgetting the office. I am only thinking of how to get there on Tuesday on a set of ribby tyres. I shall need all my skill as a driver——

MOTHER: Which is considerable . . .

FATHER: I admit that, but the peril is a constant factor. As for the children, they seem to be getting on very well without us. I fear for the Chippendale chairs, the Wedgwood porcelain and the electrically-operated cocktail cabinet.

MOTHER: Christmas only comes once a year.

FATHER: Once too often!

MOTHER: You 'll catch your death, standing around in your underwear. Summon up your charity and put it on.

FATHER: Can't I just change back into my lounge suit?

MOTHER: No, Frederick, no!

FATHER: Drat!

[*Helped by* MOTHER, FATHER *puts on the robes of the conventional Father Christmas.*]

The loss of dignity is intolerable—and this beard smells of camphor and stale fireworks.

MOTHER: That is the smell of the toy department. Come on, Father, it won't last long.

[*There is a noise in the chimney.*]

FATHER: What was that noise? Don't say the mice are back after I paid that exorbitant sum to the district ratter?

MOTHER: I hope not.

FATHER: Hope? Is that enough? I remember too well how one of them brazenly ran across the floor, even hesitating to examine us, when the Vice-Chairman of Afro-American Paints and Polishes was here to dinner.

MOTHER: Must you bring that up?

[*There is a rush of soot into the room.*]

It must be something larger than a mouse.

FATHER: Look at the angora rug! The blackness has even intruded on my cherished Axminster.

[*A pair of legs appears.*]

Good gracious!

MOTHER (*enchanted*): Father Christmas!

FATHER (*seizing a poker*): Grow up, Grace! It's a burglar.

MOTHER: A poor little Oliver Twist, no doubt.

[*A miserable* MAN *emerges from the chimney. He is dressed in the nondescript costume of a late Roman Hermit.*]

FATHER: Stay where you are!

HERMIT: I have no intention of moving.

FATHER (*terrible*): 999, Grace.

HERMIT: Excuse me, Sir, but who are you supposed to be, dressed in those clothes?

FATHER: None of your business.

HERMIT: Not by any chance—(*he pronounces the words with some pain*)—Santa Claus?

FATHER: I refuse to talk to an intruder.

HERMIT: Why? When I am quite willing to talk to an impostor?

MOTHER (*on 'phone*): Hello, Police. There 's a man here——

HERMIT (*with understandable vanity*): A saint.

MOTHER: ——a saint.

FATHER: A common or garden cat-burglar.

MOTHER: A canonized cat-burglar.

FATHER: Don't complicate the issue.

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HERMIT : It was I who complicated the issue by yielding to the incredibly uncomfortable convention that I must enter a house by its least practical entrance. Still, my patience under the persecution and torture of Diocletian and my eventual martyrdom taught me that there is nothing so bad that there isn't something worse. I can't complain. After all, tradition might have compelled me to enter houses through the drain.

MOTHER : A squad car is on its way. I should go while the going 's good.

FATHER : Grace !

MOTHER : My husband is brandishing a poker, but he 's far more frightened than you are really.

HERMIT : I 'm not frightened at all. I have felt fire and the sword, and the greater pain of doubt. A poker wielded in fear is a mere mockery of my transcendental epic. I wish you 'd put it down.

FATHER : Not on your life !

HERMIT (*laughs quietly*) : It is sad, is it not ? I am known as the patron saint of children, scholars, merchants and sailors—look me up in the " Encyclopædia Britannica " if you have any doubts. Page 416 in Volume 16 of the recent edition. You are a merchant, I believe, Sir—a director of Argosy Lathes and Flatirons and Consolidated Non-Corrosive Metals Incorporated ?

FATHER : How did you know that ?

HERMIT : I picked you at random from the infinite directory of my charges.

MOTHER (*charmed*) : With a pin ?

HERMIT : I have no pin. I use the tip of my pointed beard. And here I am, your patron saint, subjected to treatment which would be cavalier if it were not tempered with cowardice—and by now, perhaps, with superstition.

MOTHER : What do you want us to do ?

FATHER : Wait for the police.

HERMIT : Light a candle for me on the 6th of December. That is my day. History has cruelly confused it with the glorious feast of my Saviour's birth.

MOTHER : Is that all ?

HERMIT : In return, I 'll tell you that Amalgamated Albuminium Phosphates are on the verge of bankruptcy.

FATHER : What ? Ridiculous ! They 've got Insulated Aluminiums behind them !

[*The* HERMIT *laughs.*]

MOTHER : It 's obviously true, Frederick.

FATHER : Kindly mind your own business, Grace.

[*A ring at the door.*]

MOTHER : The police !

FATHER : Open the door !

HERMIT : Will you trust me ?

FATHER (*raucous*) : Open the door !

HERMIT : The merchants are a dead loss. I 'll try the children. God be with you.

[*He vanishes.*]

FATHER : Good gracious !

MOTHER : Shall I tell the police it was a mistake ?

[*The 'phone rings.*]

FATHER : Hello ! Yes . . . yes. . . . What ?

[*He puts the receiver down, a broken man.*]

MOTHER : What is it, Frederick ?

FATHER : It was J.B. Amalgamated Albuminium Phosphates. They 've failed. The President has jumped out of the 151st-floor office into Wall Street.

[*The children start chanting :* " We want Father Christmas ! "]

MOTHER (*soberly*) : You 'd better go and attend to the children, and I 'll get some tea for the police.

CURTAIN

SCENE 2.

The Street. THE CHILDREN *are singing.*

CHILDREN : " Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen——"

[*Enter the* HERMIT.]

FIRST CHILD (*rattling a box*) : Penny for the Carol Singers, Sir ?

HERMIT : What has King Wenceslas got to do with it ?

FIRST CHILD : Eh ?

HERMIT : In any case, King Wenceslas was not a particularly good king.

SECOND CHILD : Stop talkin' to the old man, Sydney—you 're upsettin' the balance. I can't hold me end up, bein' the only treble against four altos.

HERMIT : Wenceslas was completely under the thumb of Sigismond, his half-brother—I presume you are singing about Wenceslas the Fourth, King of Bohemia ?

[*A penny drops from a window. All singing stops.* THE CHILDREN *make a rush for the penny, and fight for it. The* SECOND CHILD, *by far the biggest, gets it, and starts off again*——]

" *What has King Wenceslas got to do with it?* "

SECOND CHILD : " Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen——"

HERMIT : I suppose you have no songs about Saint Nicholas ?

FIRST CHILD : Saint Nicholas ? Who 's he ?

HERMIT : He 's the patron saint of little boys and girls.

SECOND CHILD (*brutal*) : Hey, why don't you go and find a pitch of your own ? We got here first !

HERMIT : What exactly are you celebrating ?

SECOND CHILD : Christmas, silly !

HERMIT : And what is that ?

FIRST CHILD : The day I get my roller-skates.

HERMIT : And who brings you your roller-skates ?

FIRST CHILD : Santa.

HERMIT : Santa ?

FIRST CHILD : 'Course.

HERMIT : And where does this strange man live ?

FIRST CHILD : Dunno, but he comes in a sledge all the way from the North Pole and the sledge is pulled by reindeer and it 's full of presents.

SECOND CHILD : Dunce, it 's only Dad dressed up.

HERMIT : And where does he put your presents ?

CHORUS OF OTHER CHILDREN (*who are very small*) : In our stockings.

HERMIT : Is that what I 'm supposed to do ? Oh, dear, where can I get a reindeer from ? I 've never seen one, living in the Balkan Peninsula.

FIRST CHILD : Have you put your stocking out, Mister ?

HERMIT : I don't wear them.

FIRST CHILD : Poor old man !

HERMIT : Yes, indeed, poor old man. Tell me, what do you celebrate on December 6 ?

FIRST CHILD (*after a moment of reflection*) : Battle of Hastings.

SECOND CHILD : Stop talking to that silly old man or I 'll bash you !

HERMIT (*to First Child*) : Won't you talk to me ?

FIRST CHILD : I daren't.

SECOND CHILD : You heard what I said !

HERMIT (*sighing*) : Very well, but will you at least light a candle for me next 6th of December ?

[*No answer but* " Good King Wenceslas."]

Won't you, even if I do you a good turn ?

[*No answer.*]

Very well. I shall go and try my luck with the scholars. Where do I find them ? What is that tall, bleak building over there, like a gigantic slice of petrified melon ?

FIRST CHILD : B.B.C.

SECOND CHILD : Esmond ! I warned you !

HERMIT : I thank you, and for your kindness I 'll give you a piece of advice. Don't continue to sing in this precise location.

[" *Good King Wenceslas.*"]

You ignore me ? Then I can do no more.

[*He disappears into thin air.*]

FIRST CHILD : Hey ! Did you see that ? He disappeared !

SECOND CHILD : Go on with your singing as I told you, or I 'll wring your neck !

FIRST CHILD : But . . .

[SECOND CHILD *is about to swipe the* FIRST CHILD *when the whole group is inundated by a cascade of dirty water ejected from an upstairs window.*]

SECOND CHILD : There 's thanks for you. I 'm wet through.

FIRST CHILD (*radiant*) : Me, I 'm dry as a bone . . .

[*The* POLICE *enter.*]

DET.-INSP. : Have you seen an old man disappear this way ?

CURTAIN

SCENE 3.

A room full of scholars at the B.B.C. Characters who defy the work of the caricaturist by doing it for him.

CHAIRMAN : So much for the exhibition of Peruvian Linoleum in the Hampton Court Orangery, organised by the British Council, which the Critics consider quaintly abominable and only surpassed by this week's book, this week's radio feature and this week's film in general beastliness.

[*A gale of pedantic laughter.*]

We now move over to the theatre.

[*More laughter : they know what that entails.*]

Patrick Pope-Thomas, you have been to see the Pantomime, have you not ?

POPE-THOMAS : I suppose I have, yes.

[*More laughter.*]

As I sat there in the theatre, it occurred to me that there are several ways in which to assess a Christmas show—either through the eyes of a child or through the eyes of an adult—or indeed, through the eyes of an adult with a nostalgia for childhood—a ' *nostalgie de la jeunesse*,' in fact—em—to name only a few. To me, the show we have seen failed in every department and was equally unacceptable to all ages. Was it a pantomime ? I don't think so. It was an arabesque, a *jeu d'esprit*, a caracole, a badinage, an atticism, an *espièglerie*, a bouquet of confetti, an onrush of *ben trovati*—all this, perhaps, although I think not, but a pantomime, no.

CHAIRMAN : That seems to me very shrewd. Elsa Buxney, do you agree ?

BUXNEY : Yes—" *nostalgie de la jeunesse* " seems peculiarly apt, although not at all what I had in mind. But a badinage ? Surely not. It seemed to me very much a " *conte à dormir assis.*"

[*Immoderate laughter.*]

CHAIRMAN : Yes. Olwen Towel, have you anything good to say ?

TOWEL : No. [*Laughter.*]

(*She continues, conscience-struck.*) And yet, yes. (*Suppressed groan.*) Coming to the pantomime fresh from the cinema, it appeared refreshingly alive, by which I mean that the people were alive.

CHAIRMAN : Unfortunately ?

[*A roar of refined appreciation.*]

TOWEL : No, I thought the actor playing Harlequin extremely versatile. You may remember him as the paranoic vampire in this week's film. An enchanting cameo.

CHAIRMAN : He was acceptable, yes, although personally I had always seen Harlequin as more Golâtre, more given to *allegresse*, more of a figure of the traditional ridotto. R. P. Dickards, have you anything to add ?

DICKARDS : Yes. Yes, I think so. Yes.

[*Long pause. Frantic signals of the* PRODUCER *through the glass panel.*]

Em . . . naturally, my approach to pantomime as such, or rather, *qua se*, is plastic rather than emotional, and plastically speaking, in terms of the tangible, I found this production quite dreadful. I would call it an achromatic orgy of surpassing fumidity. The costumes were obnubiliated, the sets fuliginous. One prayed for the merest facula, but, of course, it was not to be.

CHAIRMAN : A model of concise appraisal, I would say. (*He looks up, and notices the* HERMIT, *who has been there from practically the beginning of the proceedings.*) Em . . . excuse me, what are you criticising ?

HERMIT : Christmas.

CHAIRMAN : What particular aspect of Christmas ?

HERMIT (*heartfelt*) : The desperate unfairness of it.

CHAIRMAN : May one know your name ?

HERMIT : Nicholas.

CHAIRMAN : I 'm afraid I 'm rather short-sighted. Is that Professor Runyon Nicholas, Keeper of the Malachite and Onyx Department at the V. and A. ? I see nothing in my notes——

HERMIT : No. Saint Nicholas.

CHAIRMAN : Saint Nicholas ?

[*He looks at the Control Room for guidance, but all the B.B.C. officials are asleep, having listened dutifully to* MR. DICKARDS.]

CHAIRMAN : Well, we 'd better go on in that case. What have you to say about Christmas ?

HERMIT : Take these red-coated, white-bearded parodies out of the department stores. At any rate, stop calling that character Santa Claus. Give him back his real Saint's Day.

[*Uproar.*]

POPE-THOMAS : Surely the figure of Santa Claus is far too deeply *énfoncé* in our *tradition-de-noël* for removal ? I don't know ; I 'm just asking a question.

BUXNEY : Hear, hear ! After all, Christmas is essentially a day for *les enfants*. It 's only fair to surrender to their love of colour and mystery for twenty-four hours in the year. We have 364 days left in which the adult element predominates.

TOWEL : I love Christmas as it is.

CHAIRMAN : That is very penetrating, Olwen Towel. Yes, I agree. And anyway, what is Santa's real Saint's Day ?

HERMIT (*vehement*) : December 6 !

CHAIRMAN (*whispering*) : You are speaking too loud for the microphone. (*Normally*) : Dickards ?

DICKARDS : Yes. No. Yes, I think so.

[*His hesitations wake up the B.B.C. officials, who sleepily examine their dials and switches.*]

Santa Claus is, with his incarnadine mantle and pure white beard, an énucleation of the mystery of Christmas, a metoposcopy of anagoges, an *épanchement* and therefore he should stay as he is.

CHAIRMAN : That seems a very cogent reason.

HERMIT : You refuse to hear my case ?

CHAIRMAN : I 'm afraid we must disagree with your criticism of Christmas, which brings us to the end of this week's——

HERMIT : As the patron saint of scholars, I deplore your attitude, and tell you here and now that you 've wasted your devious energies.

CHAIRMAN : Please, please—we 're on the air !

HERMIT : God be with you ! There are only the sailors left !

[*He disappears. An* ENGINEER *rushes in.*]

ENGINEER : Sorry, we 'll have to do that again. I 've got a new man in there, see—he forgot to turn the knob——

CHAIRMAN (*aghast*) : All that—again !

[THE POLICE *enter with bloodhounds, who are following contradictory trails, to the embarrassment of their keeper.*]

DET.-INSP. : Not so fast. Anybody seen a man dressed up as a hermit in here ?

DICKARDS : A hermit ? No, more of a debile peregrinator, a frangible itinerant, a gingerbread hadji.

DET.-INSP. : That 's the man ! Which way did he disappear ?

CHAIRMAN : Into thin air.

DET.-INSP. (*to a subordinate*) : Make a note of that, Philips.

TOWEL : Just a moment. He did say " There are only the sailors left."

DET.-INSP. : A clue, by George ! Have every port watched. Philips, you go to Grimsby ; Jones, Penzance ; Bullock, Oban ; Sandilands, Cooper, Troutbeck, follow me. We 're off to Chatham.

[*The dogs howl fitfully as they sense a vague maritime aroma.*]

SLOW CURTAIN

SCENE 4

The interior of a Battleship, decorated with holly and ivy. Thousands of SAILORS, *eating buns and drinking beer at refectory tables. At a high table, where cakes and rum are being taken,* COMMODORE DUDLEY MARTYNSIDE-BRADSHAWE, *Captain of the* Intolerable, *rises.*]

COMMODORE : Men !

[*He gets a great cheer.*]

A Merry Christmas to you.

[*Greater cheer.*]

We have with us to-day Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cerulean of Good Hope.

[*Smaller cheer.* THE ADMIRAL *rises.*]

ADMIRAL : Men !

[*Great cheer.*]

A Merry Christmas to you.

[*Greater cheer.*]

I take this opportunity of thanking Commodore Martynside-Bradshawe and the crew of the *Intolerable* for their hospitality.

[*Smaller cheer.*]

My Christmas message to you is this. Resolve to improve your marksmanship. Torpedo work is still well below par. The turn-out in many departments is frankly slack. Too many decks are still being washed with inadequate swabs, and I have noticed a great many hammocks depending upon slovenly clove-hitches for their support. We 'll never defeat the enemy if we go on like that. Maybe I 'm old-fashioned, but in my experience the mind that allows a careless knot to be the mainstay of his nocturnal security is the mind which is prepared to fire across the bows of the intruder through a gritty barrel. When I came aboard, the piping was wistful and melancholy rather than lofty and inspirational. The signalling also lacked the brisk purpose I remember from my youth ; it betrayed a weary elegance which I found frankly offensive. Little points, you may say, but ones which, calculated *in toto*, make for a defensive rather than an aggressive service. Let this be an aggressive Christmas ! Let us be able to look each other square

"*Stop calling that character Santa Claus.*"

" . . . and then, in your infinite humility, load your tiniest gun with a blank shell and fire me a small salute."

in the eye next Christmas and say, " Stap me, the old codger was right ! "

[There is a scuffle. THE HERMIT *is brought in by a party of* MARINES.*]*

COMMODORE : What is the meaning of this ?

GUARD COMMANDER : Stowaway, Sir.

COMMODORE : Stowaway ?

GUARD COMMANDER : Foreigner, I believe, Sir.

ADMIRAL (*purple*) : Foreigner ? Is there sand in the engines ? Any suspicious ticking ?

GUARD COMMANDER : No, Sir.

ADMIRAL : Don't answer back !

HERMIT : Turn to each other next 6th of December and say, " The sea is good and kind, a cradle for peaceful traffic, a world of magic horizons and twinkling secrets and winking stars and the hot, red sun. The sea is the cathedral where man can be most alone with God." And then, in your infinite humility, load your tiniest gun with a blank shell and fire me a small salute.

ADMIRAL : Great Scott ! Worse than a saboteur ! A pacifist ! (*Melancholy*) : Oh, how I regret the intrusion of civil law into the rough but virile realm of the plank and yardarm.

HERMIT : Will you not listen to me ?

ADMIRAL : Put him under arrest !

HERMIT : But I am your patron saint !

COMMODORE : Party ! Party—'shun !

HERMIT : You will regret this ! Mark my words !

[The POLICE *rush on, led by the yelping bloodhounds.]*

DET.-INSP. : There he is ! You 're under arrest !

ADMIRAL : Damned interference ! Who are you ?

DET.-INSP. : Divisional Detective-Inspector Wostenholme, Scotland Yard, Sir. Deputy Director, Invisible Ink Department. This man is dangerous. He has been creating a nuisance by consistent disappearances. We caught the boat, thank goodness, by police launch.

ADMIRAL : Caught the ship, Sir—ship, not boat. What d'you mean ? We 're at anchor.

DET.-INSP. : Didn't seem like it, Sir, the pace you were moving.

ADMIRAL : Eh ? What 's this ?

HERMIT : I warned you.

DET.-INSP. : That reminds me. I must caution you that anything you may say will be taken down and may be used in evidence.

[The bloodhounds begin to lick the HERMIT'S *hands.]*

HERMIT : I am a deeply-wronged saint with crushing responsibilities and a million ungrateful charges. All I ask is for a little festival of my own. Remember, remember, the 6th of December. I am unworthy to share Christmas with Our Lord, but perhaps I am due for at least a pause for thought on my own Saint's Day ? My sailors, scholars, merchants and even my children have let me down and even you, the police—if people took me seriously there would be no need of you.

DET.-INSP. (*shocked*) : No need of us ?

HERMIT : No, except to prosecute in parking offences and help the kiddies across the road. I am the saint to whom the traveller is supposed to appeal when confronted with footpads or bandits. Nobody has availed himself of the opportunity since the fourteenth century. I am ignored and naturally, since I was once human, a little pained. Please, please, in spite of everything, remember me !

DET.-INSP. : Is that all you have to say ?

HERMIT : Amen.

[He disappears. Before anyone can recover from their surprise, there is a thud followed by a shudder and the entire company finds itself at an angle of 45 degrees from the horizontal.]

COMMODORE : We 've dragged anchor !

ADMIRAL : We 're aground !

[Chaos from all except the bloodhounds, who wail piteously, understanding, as they do, more of these Mysteries than men.]

FINAL CURTAIN

Specially drawn for "The Sketch" by Bowyer.

"FRANKLY, CLAUDE, HE JUST COULDN'T HAVE COME THAT WAY"

"AND ON EARTH, PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN"

. . . that is the Christmas message and the thought underlying the gift from Norway—the Christmas-tree in Trafalgar Square. Symbolic of the English family gathering, the tree becomes the centre of an open-air carol service which unites, in spirit, the whole Christian world.

A STAR BY CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT

Glowing in the light of the candles is Swedish film-star Marta Toren, blue-eyed, photogenic. She 's Hollywood's last-year discovery ; has starred, among other films, in *Mystery Submarine* with Macdonald Carey, *Panther's Moon* with Howard Duff, and with Humphrey Bogart in his own production *Sirocco*.

Drawn by J. S. Goodall.

THE CHRISTMAS PROPOSAL, 1851.

"Arabella . . . dear Arabella . . . will you not give me your answer now ?"

Drawn by J. S. Goodall.

THE CHRISTMAS FORMULA, 2051

$E = mc^2$ — OR DOES IT ?

THE IMMORTAL MELODY

By John Davies

THE old man said, for the hundredth time: "I don't know, son. I don't know . . ." The son, sitting by the rough couch, watched the bearded lips moving silently in their endless, restless quest, and in compassion prompted gently: "It was a winter journey, wasn't it, father?"

The lips were gratefully still for a moment, and then the tired voice murmured: "It was, my son. A journey in the bleak mid-winter."

"And it was a long journey?"

"It was a long, long journey."

"To an unknown place?"

"To an unknown place."

"But how was the way found, father?"

Sweetness touched the lips. "There was a star, son."

A silence. A gnarled, scarred hand plucked at the coarse coverings of the couch. The son took it and held it in both his own. And it was as though the old man drew strength from those firm fingers. He was able to go on.

"There was a star, son, a star of great brightness shining in the sky. It was a wonder and a sign. And the great and wise ones interpreted the sign. A king, a great king, was to be born in a far-off land."

"The king born in a stable, father?"

The old man stirred in feeble protest. In this, his last telling of the story, nothing must be omitted.

"There was a great caravan," he said. "A great caravan of many camels. A great caravan set out from this place, bearing birthday gifts to the great king."

"And the star led the way, father?" Times without number, though he had heard this story since that time thirty years before when he had first heard it at his father's knee, the son was held spellbound yet again by its wonder and its mystery.

"The star led the way, son, always shining brightly before us. And sometimes we believed in it, and sometimes we did not. The weather was bad and the camels were troublesome. It was not an easy journey. But at last we came into the land where the great king was to be born."

The son pressed his father's hand.

Specially illustrated for "The Sketch" by J. S. Goodall.

"The pipe, father?" he put in softly.

Again that touch of sweetness about the lips.

"It was just a reed," the old man said. "A simple reed pipe, just like the ones I used to make for you to play upon, my son. I made it one evening, when the work with the camels was done and I was sitting with the others at the fire. The pipe was to be my present to the great king that was to be born. It was a poor thing, but I had nothing else. It was a foolish thing, the gift of a foolish, witless man. The other camel-men laughed at me, and with reason, for what use could a simple reed pipe be to a great king that was but a child at his mother's breast? It could only be laughed to scorn, or, at best, disregarded and set aside."

"Yet you bore it to him, father? And it was not despised?"

Once more a movement of weak protest. There was much to be told first, and there was little time left.

"We came at last, my son, to the land where the great king was to be born. We came to the chief city of that land, and the wise ones, our masters, had audience of the king of that land. They told the king of their journey, of the star and what it portended. And he, hearing them, bade them go on and seek out the child, and, when they had found him, return to him again and tell him, that he also might go and worship this one that was greater even than he. And they said that when he said this his face was pale and grim.

"So we went on through that land, with the star still leading the way. We went on until the star stopped and stood over a little town. And there our masters found the great king, lying in a stable."

"In a stable, father?" The son gently subscribed his surprise.

"In a rude, humble stable, my son, for the town was crowded with people come to pay their taxes, and there was no room at the inn or in any house. And the new-born king's mother and his father were of a lowly sort. But the king was a great king none the less. There was such greatness there in the stable that even the oxen in their stalls knew it, and what the beasts of the field know, my son, is right, and it is true.

"And our masters knew it, too. On their knees they presented their gifts, their gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, gifts so costly and so rare that I scarce dare offer the humble, worthless, silly thing I had brought. But I was permitted to go forward, and fall upon my knees even as my masters had done, and the mother of the great king graciously received the pipe, and it seemed that even the child reached out to it for a moment.

"And then, our journey and our worship done, we returned here to our land. We did not go back to bear tidings of the child's birth to the king of that land, because of the grim look on that king's pale face. We came back here, hastily and secretly, by another way."

The story was told. And the old man lay so still that it seemed death had already led him gently away. But then the grey lips whispered:

"Dark . . . dark . . . and strange. I came back here and everything was dark, and very strange. Dark . . . dark . . ."

The shaggy head began to turn from side to side, slowly at first, but then faster and faster, urgently, feverishly, until all at once a great cry of agony filled the mean little room:

"I don't know . . . I don't know!"

The son, gripping the old hand in his, sat very still. He felt infinitely humble in the presence of this thing he did not understand, which neither he nor anyone else had ever understood.

They had told him about it: how this man, his father, had, ever since his return from that journey so long ago, seemed dazed and bewildered, like one that stumbles blinded after he has looked upon too great a light; how he had become obsessed with the story of the child that was to become a great king. They had told him about it, and he had witnessed it for himself.

It was all most wonderful . . .

All had been quiet again for a little while, but now the faintest of murmurs reached the son's ears. He looked down once more at the old and beloved face. And never was he to forget what he beheld there. Never had he seen or was he to see such inexpressible sweetness and love and joy.

The old man was trying to raise himself. He was listening.

"He's playing upon the pipe, son," he whispered. "He's playing upon the pipe!"

And he fell gently back. He was dead.

Dead? . . . Dead? . . .

The son had looked on death often enough, and this was not death as he had ever known or understood it.

He bowed his head. Tears sprang to his eyes. But they were not tears of grief. Deep within him he felt a great surge of hope, a throbbing pulse of joy. And it seemed that for a moment he too could hear the immortal melody that even then was stealing softly out into that dark and ancient world.

IN THE STILL FROST OF

From the painting " La Loue, Ornans—Hiver," by Gustave Courbet (

A CHRISTMAS MORNING

319-1877). By Courtesy of Messrs. Roland, Browse and Delbanco.

Drawn by Norman Mansbridge.

"BRING ME FLESH AND BRING ME WINE . . ."
(No matter how you get it !)

Drawn by Norman Mansbridge.

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT AND SOME OLD ENGLISH CUSTOMS

TALLY HO! A CHRISTMAS COACH

From the painting by J. Y. Gilroy.

IN GREAT-GRANDMAMMA'S DAY

Drawn by Michael ffolkes.

"I BELIEVE THIS HOUSE STANDS ON AN OLD COACHING ROAD"

CHRISTMAS . . . AND THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN.

No Christmas holiday would ever be really complete without that favourite of young and old alike—the visit to the Big Top, where dare-devil trapeze artistes caper with elegant precision high above the sawdust ring; where animals perform tricks for our delight; where children revel in the frolics and fantasy of clown and auguste.

Necks craned . . . eyes bewitched . . . this typical scene from Olympia breathes the very spirit of Christmas.

Photographed by W. G. Davis.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
1. ONCE UPON A TIME — ON CHRISTMAS EVE — OLD SCROOGE SAT IN HIS COUNTING-HOUSE KEEPING HIS EYE UPON BOB CRATCHIT, HIS CLERK WHO, IN A DISMAL LITTLE CELL BEYOND, A SORT OF TANK, WAS COPYING LETTERS.
2. "A MERRY CHRISTMAS, UNCLE!" CRIED SCROOGE'S NEPHEW. "BAH!" SAID SCROOGE, "HUMBUG!"
3. "WHAT REASON HAVE YOU TO BE MERRY? YOU'RE POOR ENOUGH." "WHAT REASON HAVE YOU TO BE MOROSE? YOU'RE RICH ENOUGH." "WHAT ELSE CAN I BE WHEN I LIVE IN SUCH A WORLD OF FOOLS? IF I COULD WORK MY WILL EVERY IDIOT WHO GOES ABOUT WITH 'MERRY CHRISTMAS' ON HIS LIPS SHOULD BE BOILED WITH HIS OWN PUDDING AND BURIED WITH A STAKE OF HOLLY THROUGH HIS HEART."
4. THE NEPHEW LEFT IN DISGUST AND AT LENGTH THE HOUR FOR SHUTTING UP ARRIVED. WITH AN ILL-WILL SCROOGE GRANTED HIS CLERK THE MORROW OFF COMPLAINING THAT IT WAS HARD TO PAY A DAY'S WAGES FOR NO WORK.
5. AS SCROOGE ARRIVED AT THE DOOR OF HIS GLOOMY CHAMBERS THE KNOCKER CHANGED INTO THE FACE OF JACOB MARLEY, HIS DEAD PARTNER. NOR WAS THIS ALL. FOR IN THE NIGHT MARLEY'S GHOST APPEARED BEFORE HIM. "MERCY," CRIED SCROOGE, "DREADFUL APPARITION, WHY DO YOU TROUBLE ME?"
6. "BECAUSE IN LIFE I WAS NOT MINDFUL OF CHARITY MERCY AND BENEVOLENCE, I AM DOOMED IN DEATH TO WANDER FOR EVER, BOUND BY THESE CHAINS OF MY OWN FORGING. I COME TO WARN YOU THAT YOU WILL BE HAUNTED BY THREE SPIRITS. MIND WHAT THEY SHOW YOU AND YOU MAY ESCAPE MY FATE."
7. AND SO IT WAS. THE FIRST SPIRIT SHOWED HIM A CHRISTMAS OF HIS YOUTH WHEN HIS GREED FOR MONE HAD MADE HIM REJECT A DOWERLESS GIRL WHO LOVED HIM.
8. THE SECOND SPIRIT WAS THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT.
9. HE SHOWED SCROOGE THE POOR BUT HAPPY HOME OF BOB CRATCHIT.
"A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO US ALL MY DEARS," SAID BOB. "GOD BLESS US." "GOD BLESS US EVERYONE!" SAID TINY TIM, BOB'S LITTLE CRIPPLED SON.
10. "SPIRIT" CRIED SCROOGE, "TELL ME IF TINY TIM WILL LIVE."
"I SEE A VACANT SEAT AND A CRUTCH WITHOUT AN OWNER. IF THESE SHADOWS ARE UNALTERED BY THE FUTURE, THE CHILD WILL DIE."

By Charles Dickens
11. When the spirit left him another appeared.
"Are you the Ghost of Christmas yet to Come?" asked Scrooge. "You are about to show me what will happen in the time before us? Is that so Spirit?"
12. They were unhappy scenes the Ghost showed Scrooge. The Cratchits could not be merry for Tiny Tim was dead.
13. Dead too was an old miser. But there were no loved ones to weep here. Only old hags to plunder the very shirt off his dead body. "He frightened every one away from him when he was alive to profit us when he was dead!"
14. "Oh horror", cried Scrooge, "who was this unfortunate man?"
For answer the phantom pointed to a neglected grave-stone inscribed—"Ebenezer Scrooge."
15. "No Spirit, no! I am not the man I was. I will honour Christmas. Tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone"
16. When Scrooge opened his eyes the phantom had changed into the bed-post and the bells of the town were ringing out Christmas Day.
17. "Christmas Day! Then I haven't missed it," cried Scrooge in a delirium of joy.
"Boy, go and buy the prize turkey hanging in the poulterer's and I'll give you half-a-crown."
18. "I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. He shan't know who sent it."
19. Scrooge spent Christmas day with his astonished nephew and next morning was early at the office to catch Bob Cratchit coming late. And he did!
"Step this way sir, if you please," growled Scrooge.
20. "A merry Christmas, Bob. A merrier Christmas, Bob, than I have given you for many a year."
"I'll raise your salary and endeavour to assist your struggling family."
"And so as Tiny Tim observed—God bless us everyone."

Specially drawn for "The Sketch" by Michael ffolkes.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PAST.

Specially drawn for "The Sketch" by Peter Ender.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

Specially drawn for "The Sketch" by George Sprod.

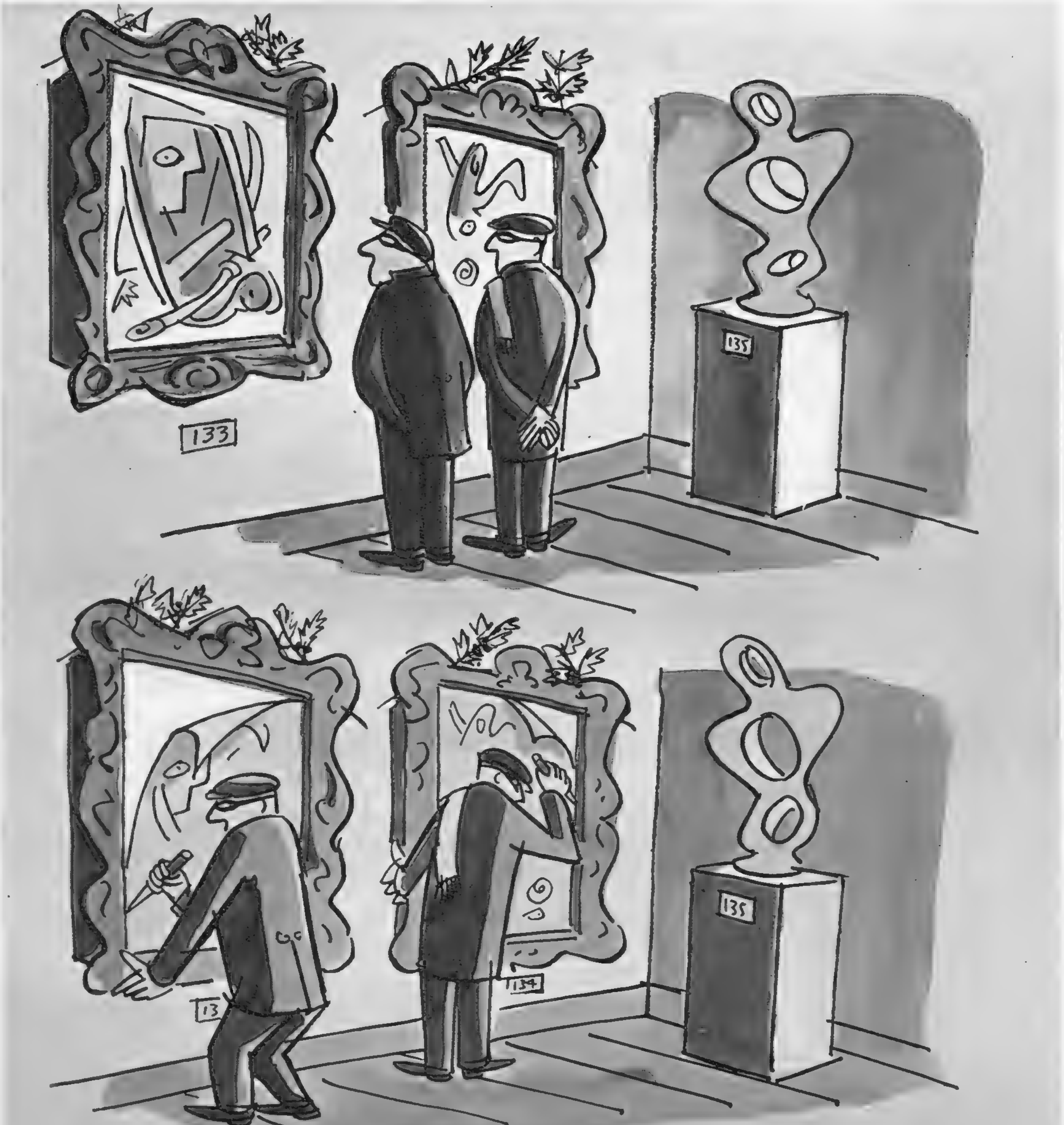
THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME?

THE CONNOISSEURS

★

Drawn by

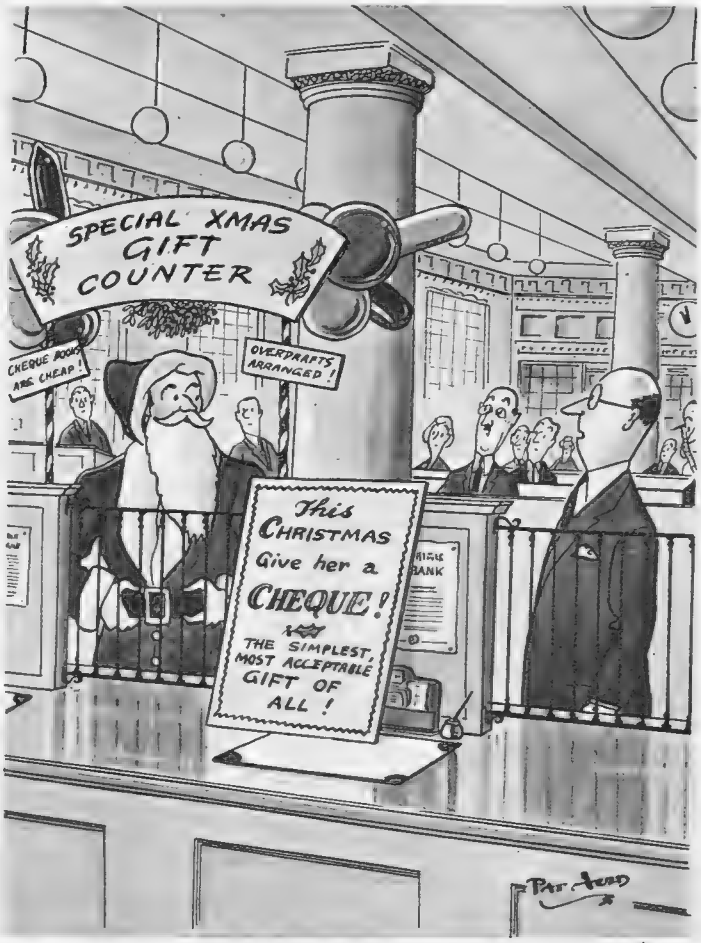
William Scully.



"Shall we have the Christmas-tree before, after, or *for* dinner?"

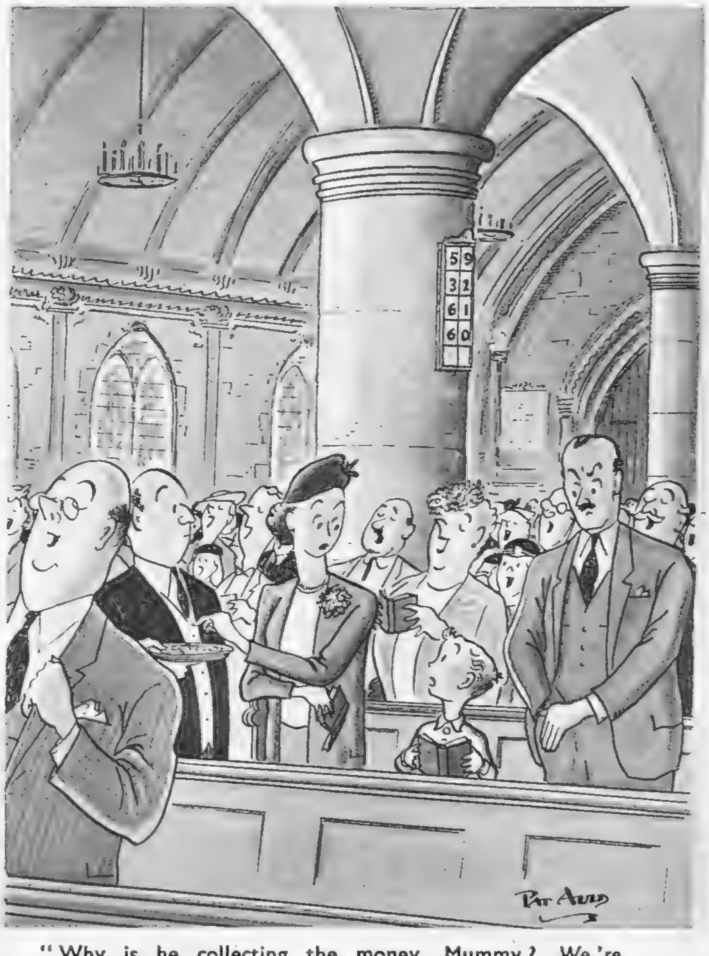
Specially drawn for

" 'Ere you are, Lady. Study the repertoire. One chorus 'Wenceslas, fourpence : full carol, a tanner ; any two choruses, our selection, a bob ; 'armonising, tuppence extra."



" Commendable initiative, Watson, but I doubt whether the manager would approve."

" Heavens ! Reindeer meat ! "



" Why is he collecting the money, Mummy ? We 're singing the carols ! "

"The Sketch" by Pat Auld.

CHRISTMAS AND THE CROOKED LADY

by Robin Estridge.

MISS PATIENCE LONSDALE, whose real name was Lindy Trigg, leaned at her bedroom window and listened to the church-bells. They sounded clear and joyous across the white fields and dark woods; and some vibration in their music caused a little drift of snow to float away from a naked wisteria twig above her head. The crystals powdered her bare arm, tingling, and melted.

Lindy swore gently under her breath; she closed the window, drew the curtains, turned her back on the bewitched night before Christmas, and regarded herself in the looking-glass across the room. Lindy Trigg regarded Patience Lonsdale, and frowned. She didn't like the demure reflection in its grey silk dress, with its mousey hair, any more than she liked the sudden heaviness of the heart which the sound of the church-bells had had upon her. But whereas dress and hair were Patience Lonsdale, and thus, at a pinch, escapable, the heart was Lindy Trigg; it was there forever.

She wished suddenly and passionately that she could pack her bag and go—not forgetting, of course, to visit the library first: top shelf on the right of the door, third book from the end, Part Seventeen of the *Sermons of Bishop Bernard Underdown*. Then she would take the seven-fifteen to London, and a 'plane to Paris. She would exchange the drab grey dress for something really outstanding by Dior, and the mousey hair for a mass of synthetic gold, as before. She would, moreover, paint her toe-nails scarlet—as a gesture of freedom.

But no. Wishing was useless. Instead, she must project herself entirely into that irksome bore, Miss Lonsdale, perfect Secretary-Companion, and join her employer, the Honourable Mrs. Vivienne Mandervill, and all her dreary friends in the drawing-room. The conversation would entirely concern one subject, about which none of them knew anything: namely, " What can have happened to the Hon. Mrs. Mandervill's famous diamond-and-emerald necklace ? " Only Lindy knew what had happened to it, since only she had removed it from Mrs. Mandervill's jewel-case and put it in the cavity behind Part Seventeen of Bishop Underdown's *Sermons.*

Now that the detectives—only *apparently* brainless, in the good old English tradition—had left the premises, she would remove the necklace to a more secure hiding-place which she had in mind. And soon—but not too soon, of course—her Aunt in Carlisle, a most invaluable old body, would have another of her " attacks;" and Miss Patience Lonsdale would regretfully hand in her notice. Miss Lindy Trigg would then visit a clever gentleman in Brussels, to whom the Mandervill emeralds would be of great interest.

The church-bells, overcoming closed windows and heavy curtains, penetrated clearly into the room. In spite of herself, she recalled how blue the shadows had been across the snow. She recalled. . . She recalled a winter—oh, seventeen years ago now—when Lindy Trigg had gone carol-singing with the other kids; and Joe Turner landlord of The Three Tuns had invited them all in for mince-pies and punch; and later Bert Wade had held her hand and told her that she was the prettiest girl there. . .

" Damnation ! " said Lindy out loud. " You 're a sentimental old cow, my girl, that 's what you are." And she drew Miss Patience Lonsdale about her like a moth-eaten old fur coat (smelling of moth-balls, too), and went downstairs. As she approached the drawing-room door she heard the Hon. Mrs. Mandervill's voice: " I had a presentiment. I *said* to Tiny on Wednesday, I said, ' I have a presentiment,' didn't I, Tiny ? And on Thursday it happened. And, my dears, those emeralds are beyond price."

Lindy sighed.

SHE first noticed it during the stand up buffet supper. The young man was standing slightly apart, by himself. He was examining one of the fabulous crackers which Mrs. Mandervill had obtained, at great price, from Fortnum and Mason; it was a work of art, delicately fashioned in white-and-crimson paper, with white silken flowers—a whole spray of them—sprouting from it; the kind of cracker which might contain anything, from a bottle of expensive scent to a smart pair of pigskin cuff-links; it was the kind of cracker —an exquisitely useless luxury created solely for destruction— which made Lindy feel complacent when she thought of the emeralds. This was the bauble which the fair, shabby, very young man in the corner picked up, examined . . . and slipped more or less unobtrusively under his too capacious jacket.

Illustrated by Fred Middlehurst.

Lindy watched, fascinated, while Major Hooper-Smith told her a faintly risqué story about a cabaret he had once been to in Shanghai. Lindy would like to have told him about the night, in Shanghai when she had met the millionaire from Brazil. She refrained, however, and watched the young man transfer his booty to a convenient hiding-place behind the curtain, on a window-sill. She watched a second magnificent creation of silk and paper follow it, and wondered a little that his astounding clumsiness, not to mention the colour of his face, which was scarlet, went unnoticed. He might, of course, be merely an amiable kleptomaniac, but on closer inspection she was inclined to doubt it. He had the kind of wide-open, fair, frank face which is generally associated with young Englishmen. It was pink, and devoid of much character, but it possessed charm and a certain modest good looks; he was not yet old enough, Lindy noticed, to have quite lost that beauty which is simply Youth and health and an open mind. His eyes were a surprisingly dark brown, very startling with fair hair. Very sincere.

No, she decided, he was not a kleptomaniac, whatever else he might be.

She watched him carefully, and saw that presently he excused himself from a tiresome-looking woman, who had appropriated him shortly after his clumsy feat of legerdemain, and that he wandered away to a far corner of the buffet table. There, while making much ado of choosing himself an ice-cream, he transferred two pink sugar cakes to his inside breast pocket—not, Lindy felt, the ideal cache for anything quite so sticky.

And still—as she bore astonished witness—his depredations went unheeded. Mrs. Mandervill's guests were too intent on their hostess's excellent champagne, and too intent on talking nonsense at the tops of their voices.

Next, after glancing almost melodramatically around the crowded room, he made for the door, the nonchalance of his walk only equalled by the pinkness of his ears. Lindy was suddenly swept by a great wave of sympathy; there was something pathetic and touching about this very young man, with his pink ears and his shabby jacket, moving among the Hon. Mrs. Mandervill's Christmas Eve guests, with their hard, smart brilliance. It came to Lindy suddenly that he and she were like two children at a window, peering in at this magnificence under the chandeliers. "We belong," she thought, "out there in the snow." And then she thought, "Gorblimey! I mustn't drink any more bubbly."

And she also thought of the clear, nostalgic music of the church-bells sounding over a white, silent world.

She knew, of course, what the shabby young man was doing in the morning-room; he was removing two presents from the glittering Christmas Tree, which it had been Lindy's job (Miss Patience Lonsdale's job) to decorate all afternoon.

When the Hon. Mrs. Mandervill led her, by now rather intoxicated, guests into the presence of the Tree, it was no surprise to the perfect Secretary-Companion to find that two of them were without gifts. Indeed, it was a contingency against which the perfect Secretary-Companion had taken precautions: there were a few unlabelled spares. The Hon. Mrs. Mandervill smiled delightedly upon her, and was heard to say that she didn't know *what* she'd do without her little Patience. And she patted her little Patience's cheek.

Lindy, suffering the cheek-patting, wondered just how much the police had really suspected her of stealing the necklace, until Mrs. Mandervill had gone into action on her behalf. "Why, Inspector!" she had cried, clasping the wronged Secretary-Companion to her ample bosom, "I will *not* have you bullying my little Patience. Why, she's like a daughter to me, and twice as useful. And I will *not* have you bullying her."

Then, as now, she had patted Lindy's cheek; and then, as now, Lindy had thought that only emeralds—and only the Mandervill emeralds at that—could ever settle the debt of so humiliating a gesture.

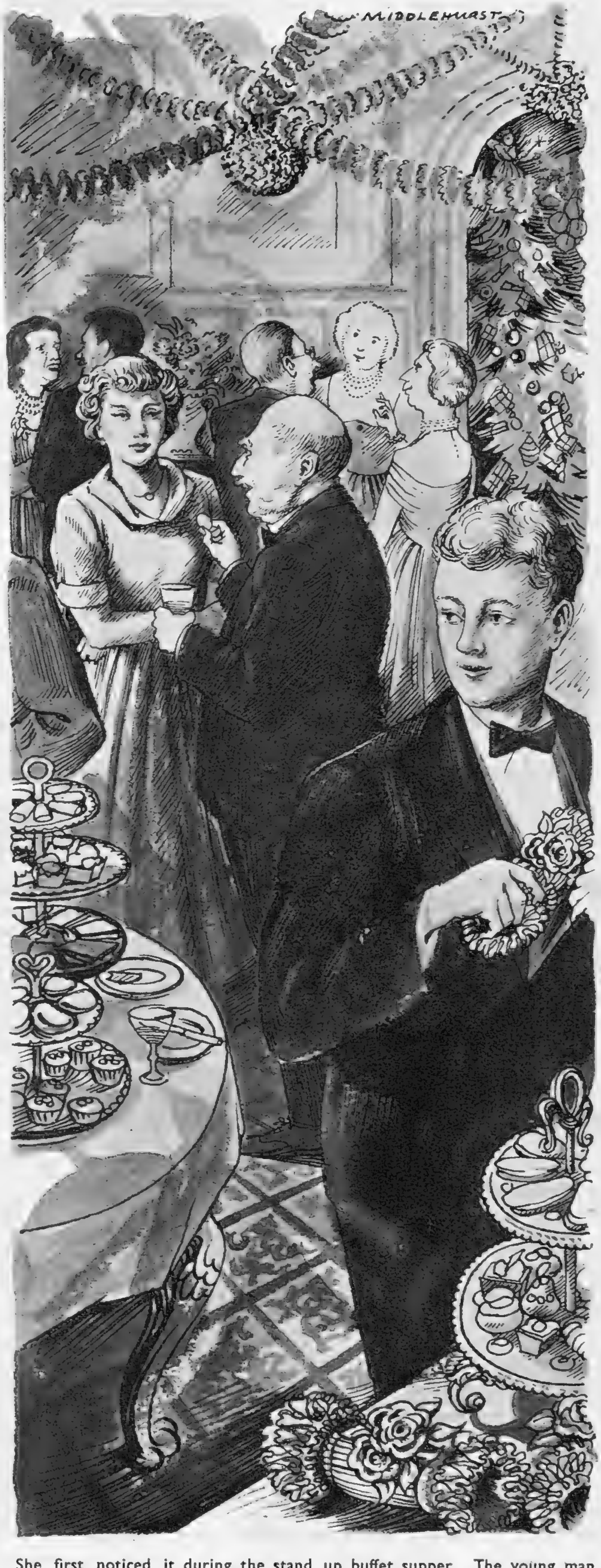
However, she suffered it again on this occasion, and then, turning to Major Hooper-Smith, who was inevitably clearing his throat at her elbow, said, "Who is that nice-looking boy standing just to the right of the Tree?"

The Major adjusted his monocle, and stared. "Oh," he said, with evident disinterest, "You mean young Wycherly. Haven't seen him for some while. Works in London now, I hear. Must be spending Christmas with his sister. Sad case, that. No doubt you heard about it. Her husband was killed in that flying accident over at Downham. Decent feller, by all accounts."

Lindy nodded, watching young Mr. Wycherly pocket a silver star from a convenient bough of the Tree; something else—she couldn't see exactly what, since he was doing it with a hand held behind his back—followed. His ill-fitting suit, she noticed, was beginning to bulge in a peculiar manner.

And it was exactly at this moment that she noticed the waiter. He was standing by the door, regarding young Mr. Wycherly's bulging dinner jacket with a cold, analytical eye. At once she remembered that Mrs. Mandervill, not wishing any of her guests'

[*Continued on page* 54.



She first noticed it during the stand up buffet supper. The young man was standing slightly apart, by himself. He was examining one of the fabulous crackers . . . this was the bauble which he examined . . . and slipped more or less unobtrusively under his too-capacious jacket.

Albert Hart

SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY . . .

. . . for a jewel a setting. For Beauty, rich furs—furs, the age-long desire of almost every woman. And here, at their most sumptuous, are furs to add that princely air, whatever the occasion.

Left: Magnificent Mink is worked in design to highlight the all-in-one movement of this elegant, coolie-style jacket. *Albert Hart.*

Right: Superb Silverblu Mink Cape Stole. *Molho* also make this model in dark Mink and grey Russian Squirrel.

Christmas table decoration by Heal's.

Molho

By Ann Murray

Bradleys

Ground-length, waist-fitted evening coat of white Russian ermine. The sleeves, which are worn three-quarter length in the picture, can be rolled down and worn full length. ***Bradleys.***

Christmas and the Crooked Lady

(Continued from page 51.)

trinkets to vanish as had her own, had arranged for a plain-clothes-man to be on duty. Lindy knew a policeman when she saw one. And the waiter was a policeman. . .

While she was wondering just how she should warn the young man that his inexperienced looting had not gone unobserved, he moved from the Christmas Tree, wended his way across the room and out into the hall. To her horror the plain-clothes-man followed him, with a purposeful curve to his back which Lindy, alas, knew all too well. She interrupted Major Hooper-Smith's monologue about gay nights in Bombay, excused herself with the dim smile which seemed to have become an integral part of Miss Patience Lonsdale's character, and set off in pursuit of the hunter and the hunted.

She found them standing together in a corner of the deserted hall, and saw, to her relief, that battle had not yet been joined. The policeman was just saying, " Excuse me, Sir, I wonder if I could trouble you for a moment. . ."

Lindy swooped. " Ah, Mr. Wycherly, there you are," she cried, using the most petrified accents of Miss Lonsdale's gentility. " Mrs. Mandervill sent me to ask if you 'd like any more decorations for your Christmas Tree. Really good ones have been *so* hard to get this year." And she slipped a lithe and practised hand into his pocket, and drew out the silver star which she had seen him put there a moment before.

It would have been hard to say whether the young man or the Arm of the Law goggled the more widely. Lindy did not linger to make comparisons, but took Mr. Wycherly's arm in a grip of steel, and heaved him by main force across the hall and out into the conservatory, observing as she did so, " But first I *must* show you those orchids I was telling you about."

They faced each other over the waxen, unreal flowers.

THEY faced each other over the waxen, unreal flowers, and he said, " I, er . . . I mean . . . I . . . You're Mrs. Mandervill's secretary . . . aren't you ? "

" I am," replied Lindy ; and in a loud vioce, " Now that 's *my* favourite, the dark purple one. Isn't it *too* lovely ? I was saying to Mrs. Mandervill only yesterday. . ."

The policeman moved away.

Lindy said, " Well, you 're a prize boob, aren't you ? "

He gulped. " Look here . . . I mean to say . . . Oh, damn ! I really am most awfully sorry. Terribly ashamed." He glanced over his shoulder. " It was jolly decent of you. Coming to rescue me like that, I mean. I . . . I can't possibly expect you to understand." He looked away, through the glass wall of the conservatory to where the moonlight lay clean and cold across the snow.

Gently, for he touched her more deeply than she wished to be touched, Lindy said, " You don't have to explain."

The policeman was just saying, " Excuse me, Sir, . . ."

" Oh, but I must." The brown eyes were very straight and honest. " I must. I mean, it 's very simple really. Or, rather. . ."

Lindy reached back into her own youth. One winter, when she had been twelve, there was a kids' party at the Mission Hall, and Polly, the little one, had been in bed with 'flu, and couldn't go. She remembered so clearly how she had brought the things back hidden under her coat : the chocolate biscuits and the iced cake, the few oddments from other people's crackers which she had gleaned from the littered floor, and . . . Oh, yes, she remembered very clearly —and a star off the Christmas Tree.

She glanced at the young face, almost drawn now in embarrassment—or something deeper. " I had a kid brother and sister, too," she said, still gently.

He started. " Oh. Well . . . Well, in point of fact, they 're not. Not really." He coloured. " I 'm their uncle."

She remembered then what the Major had said about the boy's sister—about her husband being killed in some air crash.

" How old ? " she enquired, steadying him by her ordinary conversational tone.

" Six and four." Again the honest eyes met hers. " You see, we 're awfully hard-up. My sister's husband is dead ; he wasn't awfully clever with money, anyway, and she 's having a bad time. And I . . ." He gesticulated. " I 'm not much help, I 'm afraid."

She nodded.

Suddenly passionate, he said, " Children have *got* to have some sort of Christmas, haven't they ? I mean, we 've done quite a lot, but somehow this evening, when we filled their stockings, it was . . . it was all a bit . . . pathetic." He shrugged wanly. " There was something missing. And when I got up here and saw those crackers and that Tree, I . . . I knew what it was ; there wasn't any *glamour*." He achieved a not very convincing smile. " That sounds nonsensical, I suppose ? "

" No. No, of course it doesn't." Lindy was moved. Something which had first stirred in her at the sound of the bells across the snow began to grow and swell. It was a kind of rebellion, perhaps, against so many meaningless Christmases : last year in Lisbon, and the year before that in Rio, and the year before that in Trinidad, and the year before that . . . She had forgotten. Christmas, she was astonished to find, still meant Home to her—still meant snow on cottage roofs, and robins, and bells—still, after so long.

" I say." He produced two gaily wrapped packages from his pocket. " I say, I do feel a bit bad about these. I mean, the crackers and things were all right, but these. . ."

" Well," said Lindy, " considering one 's a bottle of Chanel, and the other 's a rather grand wallet, they won't mean much to Six and Four, will they ? "

" No." He shook his head as if to clear it. " I sort of went mad, I think." He pressed them towards her. " I 'll keep the little bits," he added, almost defiantly, " if you don't mind."

[Continued on page 56.

Horrockses Fashions
REGD.
in Fine Cotton

"This is what Christmas meant for me once—even for me."

Christmas and the Crooked Lady

(*Continued from page 54.*)

"I've got a better idea," said Lindy. And she knew suddenly that she was going to make a fool of herself. It had happened before; it was, indeed, a standing joke in the dark world which she inhabited. "Lindy," they'd say, "Old Lindy's off again on her blinkin' Fairy Godmother act."

"So what?" she demanded of herself. "It's Christmas, isn't it?"

"I tell you what," she said. "I'll go back and get some more stuff; there's masses of it we didn't even use. And a box of those posh crackers."

"I say, will you really?" They were both grinning like naughty schoolchildren now.

"You bet. We'll show Six and Four a thing or two." And Lindy Trigg giggled, remembering the dank, squalid tenement in which she had whiled away her youth.

"IT'S the champagne," she thought. "You never could take champagne."

And yet, gazing down at the sleeping faces of the two children, she knew that what moved her lay deeper than that. Something quite pure, untroubled, beautiful in those faces unmanned her utterly, and she thought, "This is what Christmas meant for me once—even for me, even for old Lindy." And she did, at that moment, feel very, very old: dirty, useless, and oh, so sorry for herself.

At the foot of the two small beds, the bulging stockings seemed almost to radiate a light of their own. In the moon-dusted darkness they held all the magic and mystery, the glitter and (as the boy had said) the glamour which are so much a part of a child's Christmas. The air was permeated with a sweet, exciting scent of tangerine, and the low ceiling was spangled with loops of shining tinsel, with silver stars and gaudy glass baubles that winked and gleamed at each breath of cold air from the open window.

The young man interrupted her scrutiny of the sleeping faces to whisper, "I hope the little beggers don't die of shock when they wake up."

Lindy said, "They're sweet kids." Then she shook herself, as if struggling free from some cobweb net of memory. "Come on. We'd better go."

Outside the door he paused, staring at her. "Why don't you come down to tea to-morrow and meet them—and Mary, too. They'd all love it."

She shook her head. "We've got another party up at the Hall. Besides . . ." She shrugged away the chasm of differences which separated these people in their tiny cottage at the edge of an English village, from Lindy Trigg, *alias* Louise Wentworth, *alias* Anne Parsons, *alias* . . . Oh, a dozen other *aliases*.

All she wanted now was to escape from this place and this innocence, before, in her unguarded state, she really did make a fool of herself.

She glanced at the young man, who was regarding her with frank curiosity, and said, "I must get back to that party."

"Won't it be over?"

"Heavens, no. They'll keep it up all night."

"I say," He peered at her in the half-light. "Do you feel all right?"

"Perfectly."

He continued to look doubtful. "I'll see you back to the Hall."

She nodded dumbly, though she did not in the least want his company. She was thinking of the two children—of the rounded, sleep-enchanted faces pressed into the pillows. Absolute innocence. Absolute youth. "Oh, hell!" thought Lindy Trigg. "I shall bellow in a moment if this goes on." She felt dirty, and old, and infinitely weary. "And for heaven's sake," she told herself as an afterthought, "don't spend next Christmas in England. Get somewhere a bit less atmospheric. Say, Peru."

The young man was talking. She tried hard not to listen; to shut herself off from him; she felt that her assaulted heart could stand only a little more reality before it collapsed.

"Gosh," he was saying, "if I had just the money she must be spending on this one party to-night, I'd . . ."

"You'd what?"

He waved his arms about. "Why, I could do everything. First of all, I'd give Mary a nice lump to take care of herself and the children; and then I'd give up my ghastly job . . ." He glanced at her. "I'm a clerk, you know. And guess what I'd do?"

Lindy was beyond guessing.

He laughed excitedly. "I'd travel. I'd see places—on the cheap, you know. Gosh, have you ever thought of all the marvellous places there are to see? I'd go to Shanghai and back, working my way."

Lindy shuddered.

"You see," he said, "I believe young people *should* see the world; get an idea of how other people live; get to understand them. That's the way to end wars. World Brotherhood, I call it."

Lindy, out of her slough of despond, sighed thinly for so much enthusiasm. "But oh," her heart cried, "to be able to be enthusiastic about *anything!*" His youth maddened and yet moved her. The fierce excitement in his voice touched her. Damnation! Everything seemed to touch her to-night—starting with church-bells on the snow. And that was plain corny.

"How old are you?" she asked obliquely, not caring much, but determined to divert the idealism.

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen," she thought. "Gorblimey; when I was nineteen I was working the old Confidence line with Gerry Weston in Biarritz." She said, "You're a nice kid."

He grimaced. "I shouldn't have thought you'd think so after . . . after to-night. I should have said I was a bit of a crook." He glanced at her. "I say, what's the matter? You aren't . . . regretting what we did, are you?"

At this—at his colossal innocence—she laughed abruptly. Not a very amused laugh. And suddenly she choked, and the whole of Christmas: the snow, the bells, the sleeping children, peace-on-earth,

[*Continued on page 61.*

WILLIAM CRAWFORD & SONS LTD., EDINBURGH, LIVERPOOL & LONDON

Drawn by Sillince.

"JOHN—WHERE DO 'EE KEEP THEY CATHODE RAY OSCILLOGRAPHS?"

H.M.S. EXCELLENT
FOR THE PRESENT AND ALWAYS
Player's Please
PLAYER'S NAVY CUT CIGARETTES
NCC 698

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Christmas and the Crooked Lady

(Continued from page 56.)

goodwill, tinsel, holly, simplicity, all came crashing down on her. She turned away from him, leaned against a convenient beech-tree, and burst into tears.

She wept not only for Christmas present, but for Christmas past. She wept not only for herself but for the young man beside her—who was hopping from one foot to the other and saying, "Oh, good Lord . . . I mean . . . I say, look here, can I . . ."—and she wept for her sister Polly, unable to go to the party at the Mission Hall all those years ago. She wept for Lindy Trigg, aged twenty-one, entertaining a Brazilian millionaire in Shanghai, and for Lindy Trigg aged twenty-nine, now, to-night, in her absolute loneliness. She wept for two sleeping children, and for their mother, whose husband had been killed, and who was too poor to be happy; and for the Honourable Mrs. Mandervill, who was too rich to be happy. She wept for everything and for nothing. She wept for Christmas.

Presently she relapsed into a state of hiccups and sniffs which she found most humiliating. And presently into silence. The young man waited, awkwardly, but with a gentle, understanding quietness. At length she turned round.

"There." she said. "That 's that."

He appeared startled by such decisiveness. "I 'm sorry," he began, "if . . ."

Lindy took him by both shoulders, and, oblivious of her ravaged face, stared at him fixedly. "Don't you be sorry," she said. "You 've nothing to be sorry about, let me tell you. Just you go on being glad, like you are now, and thank God for it."

She knew, seeing his honest, troubled eyes, exactly what she would do. A mad kind of elation blossomed inside her, and rose triumphant above that flood of tears. She was suddenly lifted on an exhilarating switchback of purpose, knowing that she was going to do something big, and do it properly. The same feeling had gripped her as she had turned the key of the Hon. Mrs. Mandervill's jewel-case and lifted the lid to disclose the glittering magnificence of the necklace. . .

SHE seized his arm and urged him towards the house, where lighted windows cast paths of gold across the snow. Now that this wild idea had possession of her she wanted to act at once; impatience overwhelmed her.

When they reached the terrace, she thrust him into a deep angle of shadow formed by a flight of steps. Above them the sounds of the party, dance music, laughter and a high-pitched gaggle of voices, floated clearly on the chill air.

"Stay here," said Lindy. "Don't move. I won't be a minute."

He stood transfixed by the shining intensity of her mood; bewildered; exhausted; even a little scared. A kind of dream-like unreasonableness seemed to have taken hold of the entire evening. A woman laughed on the terrace over his head. "Well, you can stay out here if you like," she said. "I 'm frozen; I 'm going indoors."

Presently Lindy returned, materialising expertly out of shadow. She was breathless, and on the verge of laughter, which made no sense to the shivering young man. She herself seemed unaware of the cold.

"Now," she said, "you can keep a secret, can't you?"

"Yes."

"Swear." She gripped his arm again, and her strength, alarmed him; he wondered if she might by any chance be a little mad. "Swear," she said, "on . . . on your sister and her children. Swear you 'll say nothing and ask no questions. Go on."

He swore, solemnly. "But look here . . ." he began, and broke off, aghast. For, right under his nose—more brilliant than the stars, more dazzling than all the tinsel on all the Christmas Trees in the world—glittered the Hon. Mrs. Mandervill's diamond-and-emerald necklace.

"But," he said, "isn't that . . .?"

"Yes," she snapped, "it is. Take it."

"But . . ."

"*Take it.*"

"Oh, no; I can't. I mean, I . . ." He glared. "How did you get it?"

"No questions. You promised."

He seemed to shrink away, as if the cold fire of the jewels was burning him.

"Listen, oaf," hissed Lindy. "You want money, don't you? Your sister, the kids, your precious World Brotherhood."

He moaned.

"I 'm not asking you to sell the thing, you big ox. No one could sell it in this country, anyway."

"Then what . . .?"

She shook him impatiently. "I 'm asking you to return it to the old hag, idiot. Don't you understand? She 's offering a reward: two thousand smackers. It 's yours."

He goggled. "But it 's not honest."

"Why not? You didn't nick it. And anyway, what 's a couple of thousand to her? She 's lost that much in a night at *chemin-de-fer*—she told me so."

He was now quite speechless.

"And you don't have to worry about that nosy-parker dressed up as a waiter. I took the precaution of asking the Hon. Mrs. M. if you could have those crackers and what-all; you 're in the clear, boy."

He gulped, staring fascinated at the necklace.

"Blimey," she said, "if you don't take it in to her I 'll do it myself. Look here." She dropped it, glittering, into the snow, and put her foot on it.

"Don't." He snatched it up, aghast at such desecration.

"Now," said Lindy. "Listen to me. You were walking home by the path through the wood—the one we 've just come by—and your foot kicked-up something that sparkled. The thief must have dropped it, and the fall of snow—which, I may as well tell you, came on the night of the robbery—must have covered it up. And don't look so scared; no one 's going to suspect you, because you were in London at the time."

She propelled him up the terrace steps.

"Don't say a word about me. The last time you saw me was in the conservatory when I brought you the tinsel and stuff. And don't worry; I can take care of myself."

At this he grinned suddenly. "Yes, I think you can."

"Good. Now get moving, and remember what you promised."

He hesitated. "I say, you 're taking a bit of a risk, aren't you—trusting me like this?"

She regarded him appraisingly. "Little boy, I 've been knocking around for quite a long time now. I know you. You 'd never let me down in a thousand years."

He glanced down at the necklace, which he held as he might a dead rat. "No," he said. "I 'd never let you down. I . . . I don't . . . know quite how to say Thank You, all the same."

"Get moving. You embarrass me, waving that thing about." She stepped up to him and kissed his cheek. "Just call it a Christmas present from your old Aunt Lin . . . Aunt Patience. Now, scram."

She watched him go, walking like a man in a dream, up to the top step. Then he vanished.

She leaned against the wall of the terrace, feeling quite limp, maybe a trifle angry with herself, but on the whole extremely happy. "A year wasted," she thought. "All those maddening pats on the cheek unpaid for. Ah, well."

It was surprising to find how little she cared really. The moment of wildness had passed, it was true; but her heart, which had been so heavy, was light now. She smiled at the stars, and was happy.

Presently she heard the noise of the party, the chatter and the music, die away into a sudden astounded silence. Then came a communal gasp of exclamation. Another silence. She could see him, in her mind's eye, pink-faced and embarrassed in the middle of the dance floor, the fabulous necklace dangling like a dead rat from his hand. She laughed at the stars.

Far across the snow, a clock began to sound. She counted the twelve measured strokes. An owl hooted somewhere beyond the white fields.

Aloud to herself, she said, "Merry Christmas, Lindy, you sentimental old trout."

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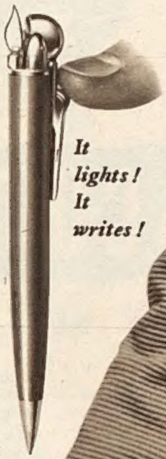

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